NATION

Kerala wrongly depicted in 'The Kerala Story 2': HC

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BUSINESS

Bitcoin falls sharply by 19%, faces worst decline since 2022

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SPORTS

Day 1 Ranji final: J&K dominates Karnataka

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Now, Kerala will be known as Keralam

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the Kerala government's proposal to rename the state as 'Keralam', Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced.

The decision comes weeks ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled for April.

The approval was granted at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, held at Seva Teerth, the new Prime Minister's Office complex.

According to an official release, following the Cabinet's clearance, the President will re-fer the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026 to the Kerala Legislative Assembly for its views under the proviso to Article 3 of the Constitution. After receiving the Assembly's feedback, the Centre will seek the President's recommendation to introduce the Bill in Parliament to formally change the state's name from 'Kerala' to 'Keralam'.

The Kerala Legislative Assembly had unanimously passed a resolution on 24 June 2024 seeking the change. The resolution noted that the state's name in Malayalam is 'Kera-lam' and that states were reorganised on linguistic lines on 1 November 1956, a date observed as Kerala Piravi Day.

It further stated that the demand for a unified Kerala for Malayalam-speaking people dates back to the Independence movement. However, the First Schedule of the Constitution records the state's name as 'Kerala'. The Assembly had urged the Centre to take urgent steps under Article 3 to amend the name to 'Keralam'. —PTI

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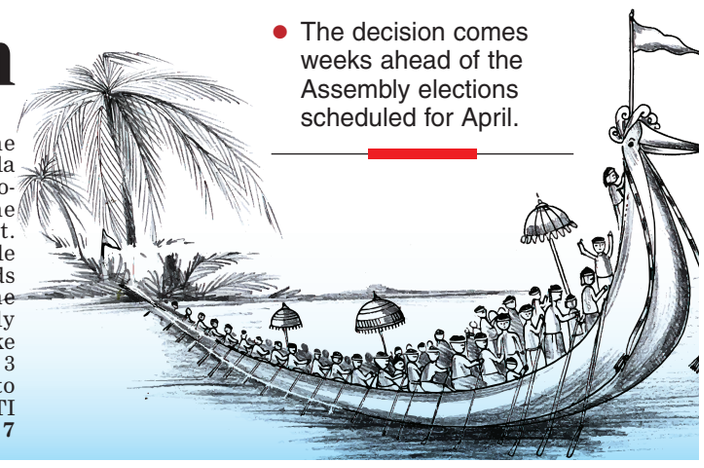
- The decision comes weeks ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled for April.



UNFILTERED

Selling such items (meat) in the open, especially in the vicinity of religious institutions, adversely affects the purity of our sentiments. Similarly, these need to be kept away from educational institutions to prevent violent tendencies among children

—Vijay Kumar Sinha, Bihar DyCM defends ban on open selling of meat

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80L OBJECTIONS IN 80 DAYS

The Court also instructed EC to bear the expenses of the judicial officers —PTI

SC deploys J'khand, Odisha judicial officers for WB SIR

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Supreme Court on Tuesday authorised the Calcutta High Court chief justice to deploy civil judges and requisition judicial officers from neighbouring Jharkhand and Odisha to handle 80 lakh claims and objections in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi noted a letter from the Calcutta High Court chief justice stating that the 250 district judges currently involved in the SIR would require around 80 days to process all claims. Citing the time constraints and the scale of the exercise, the bench permitted the deployment of civil judges and directed the chief justice to seek assistance from Jharkhand and Odisha, requisitioning officers of comparable rank.

The Supreme Court also instructed the Election Commission (EC) to bear the expenses of deploying these judicial officers. Additionally, the bench allowed the EC to publish the final electoral roll on 28 February and clarified that supplementary lists may be issued as verification proceeds.

The ruling drew immediate political reactions. The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) criticised the EC's "arrogant attitude," describing the Supreme Court order as a decisive victory for "Bengal's Maa-Mati-Manush." In contrast, the BJP accused the TMC of deliberately delaying the SIR process. BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya said the SC's order to deploy officers from other states demonstrated that the "highest court in the country has no faith in the Bengal administration." —PTI

Did NOTA lead to election of 'quality' leaders, asks SC

The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned whether the provision of NOTA (None of the Above) in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections has improved the "quality of elected leaders," noting that it cannot fill a seat. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing a PIL challenging the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which bars voters from choosing NOTA when a candidate runs unopposed. Introduced in 2013 following the People's Union for Civil Liberties judgment, NOTA cannot become an entity, the court said. The bench urged efforts to make voting compulsory, highlighting lower turnout among educated voters compared to uneducated and women. — PTI

Dharwad protests for 2.8L govt jobs

Govt accused of not fulfilling poll promises

BENGALURU/DHARWAD, 24 FEB

Protests by thousands of job aspirants escalated in Dharwad on Tuesday, demanding the immediate filling of 2.84 lakh vacant government posts. The demonstration drew support from the unified opposition of the BJP and JD(S), who urged the government to address the vacancies.

A large number of aspirants gathered at the protest site, raising slogans, carrying placards, banners, and posters, and burning effigies of Karnataka ministers. As tensions rose, police were deployed to maintain law and order, with several protesters, including All Karnataka State Students' Association (AKSSA) president R Kanthakumar, taken into preventive custody. Authorities blamed Kanthakumar for the protest "spiralling out of control." Aspirants warned that the agitation would continue until their demands were met, with some threatening to lay siege to the Vidhana Soudha if the government failed to act. "We don't want a situation like Nepal or Bangladesh, but the government should take note of our demands," one protester said. Kanthakumar highlighted that while 2.84 lakh posts across 43 departments remain vacant, the Congress government had promised to fill one lakh jobs within a year, but in three years, fewer than 5,000 posts have been filled.

Police stated preventive action was necessary to restore order amid the escalating agitation. —PTI

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A large number of aspirants gathered at the protest site, raising slogans, carrying placards, banners and posters —: X @BSBOMMAI/

Investors lose Rs 2.85L as AI fears makes D Street bleed

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Investors lost Rs 2.85 lakh crore in wealth on Tuesday, dragging the total BSE market capitalisation to around Rs 466 lakh crore as key indices fell sharply. The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 1,068.74 points, or 1.28 per cent, to close at 82,225.92, while the 50-share NSE Nifty fell 288.35 points, or 1.12 per cent, to 25,424.65, snapping a two-session rally. Heavy losses in IT stocks were triggered by concerns over AI-driven disruption and renewed trade uncertainties.

A report by New York-based Citrini Research warned that AI dominance could erode the human-centric consumer economy, affecting employment and investor confidence.

Shares of IBM too suffered their steepest single-day fall in 25 years, dropping 13.2 per cent to Rs 223.35 after AI startup Anthropic's Claude Code tool raised fears of disruption to IBM's mainframe software business. —PTI

>>>More on Page 7

HC gives relief to Ranveer Singh in 'Kantara' case

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

In a relief to Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh, the Karnataka High Court on Tuesday directed police not to take any coercive steps against him in a case related to allegedly mocking a local deity in the Kannada film 'Kantara'. Hearing his petition seeking quashing of an FIR for allegedly mocking a deity of coastal Karnataka, the bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna gave the direction to the Bengaluru police while reprimanding the actor. —PTI

>>>More on Page 2

Youth Cong Chief held for AI summit 'shirtless' protest

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Delhi Police has arrested Indian Youth Congress President Uday Bhanu Chib as the "main conspirator" and "mastermind" of the shirtless protest staged by a group of youth wing members at the AI Impact Summit here last week, officials said on Tuesday. The arrest memo terms Chib the main conspirator and mastermind of the unlawful assembly at the Bharat Mandapam, where the protesters raised "anti-national slogans" and tried to incite a "riot-like situation". —PTI

>>>MORE ON PAGE 3

B'luru's Ajim Premji varsity sees ABVP protest

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

Members of ABVP protested on Tuesday at Azim Premji University near Sarjapur in Anekal taluk, alleging that an event held on campus promoted separatism in Jammu and Kashmir and insulted the Indian Army.

Students, speaking to **Salar News** on condition of anonymity, claimed that the right-wing group broke open the gates and barged into the campus.

Protesters raised slogans, smeared the university's nameplate with black ink and allegedly vandalised property. Police rushed to the spot to prevent escalation and took several ABVP activists into preventive custody.

The ABVP alleged that a programme organised by 'Spark', an All-India Students' Association (AISA)-backed group, promoted "anti-India" ideas and claimed that Jammu and Kashmir was not part of India. Protesters reportedly displayed a poster linking the event to the Kunan-Poshpora incident of 23-24 February, 1991 University sources said the event was not organised by the administration. Participants denied the allegations.

ABVP protesters, however, claimed they were assaulted when they objected to the programme. —Salar News

7 rape Assam woman in front of beau

SILCHAR, 24 FEB

A 28-year-old woman was allegedly raped by seven men who also extorted money from her while she was out with her boyfriend near Silchar in Assam's Cachar district, police confirmed on Tuesday. The woman filed a complaint on 19 February, and a case has been registered, a senior police officer stated. The victim identified two of the accused, who have been arrested.

The case was registered at Silchar Sadar Police Station under multiple sections. Her medical examination has been conducted, and her statement recorded.

The victim alleged that the seven men raped her sequentially and forced her to transfer Rs 10,000 to one of the accused's accounts. The issue gained social media attention after a Silchar-based journalist was attacked by family members of an accused near the National Highway Road police station, where he was questioned and assaulted but rescued by onlookers. —PTI

Deepak Chopra asked Epstein to 'bring girls on trips'

WASHINGTON, 24 FEB

Best-selling author and wellness guru Deepak Chopra exchanged hundreds of emails with the late convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, according to the recently released files by the US Justice Department. In at least two of the exchanges, Chopra asked Epstein to bring "girls" on trips, including one to Israel, saying that they would "love it".

Chopra and Epstein exchanged several emails between 2016-2019, well after Epstein was publicly known to be a sex trafficker. In one correspondence, Epstein wrote, "I liked watching you zero in on your prey. Made me smile." Chopra responded, "I not a predator. Just a lover."

On 4 February, soon after the latest batch of files were released, Chopra denied participating in any illegal activities. Yet, Epstein is seen inviting Chopra to his infamous Virgin Islands. —Agencies

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7 minors detained for murdering boy in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 24 FEB

A 16-year-old boy was murdered outside a government school in Shivamogga's Sulaebailu on Tuesday over a discussion about a cricket match, police said, resulting in heightened tension in the area. A large police force has been deployed following the incident, which took on a communal undertone. Seven minors involved were taken into custody.

The victim, Sanketh, an SSLC student of government school intervened in an argument involving a group of boys, SP Nikhil B said."They hit him. Sanketh collapsed immediately and died before reaching hospital," SP said. He was hit on the chest. —PTI

>>>More on Page 2

FOR CERVICAL CANCER

INDIA TO ROLLOUT FREE HPV VACCINES FOR GIRLS AGED 14

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

In a major step towards eliminating preventable cancers among women, the Union government will soon roll out a nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting 14-year-old girls, official sources said on Tuesday. The programme will use a single-shot Gardasil, a quadrivalent vaccine protecting against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11.

Vaccination will be voluntary and free. By targeting girls before potential exposure, the programme aims to provide lifelong protection and significantly reduce future cervical cancer burden

This campaign will be a special drive, separate from the Universal Immunisation Programme. The vaccine has a strong safety record, supported by over 500 million doses administered globally since 2006, with studies showing 93–100 per cent effectiveness.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among Indian women, with nearly 80,000 new cases and 42,000 deaths annually. —PTI

India imports HPV vaccines from US

India is set to import the quadrivalent HPV vaccine, Gardasil-4, from the US, with Merck & Co supplying at least 16.02 crore doses. In the open market, Gardasil-4 costs Rs 3,927 per dose for girls under 15, who need two doses, and above 15 who require three doses. India's indigenous alternative, CERVAVAC, produced by Serum Institute, offers a more affordable option at around Rs 2,000 for two doses.

Indian students in Iran fear losing academic year

TEHRAN, 24 FEBRUARY

As concerns continue to mount over the evolving situation in Iran, several Indian students -- particularly those from Jammu and Kashmir -- have expressed their desire to return home but say they are unable to do so due to their upcoming examinations scheduled for March.

A large number of these students are enrolled in medical programmes at universities across Iran and say that their institutions have not announced any postponement of examinations despite the prevailing uncertainty. This has placed them in a difficult position: either stay back to complete their exams or return to India and risk losing an academic year.

The All India Medical Students Association (AIMSA) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging immediate intervention.

In its appeal, AIMSA has requested that the Government of India engage with Iranian authorities and universities to explore the possibility of postponing examinations so that students who wish to return home can do so without jeopardising their studies. —ANI

>>>More on Pages 5, 6

A morgue after Iran's crackdown on protesters in January —x

CM blames BJP for 2.8L govt job vacancies

BJP cites Cong manifesto, which pledged to fill approved govt vacancies within 1 year

DHARWAD, 24 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday blamed the previous BJP government for the backlog of over 2.84 lakh vacant government posts, as protests by thousands of job aspirants escalated in Dharwad.

Speaking amid mounting tensions, the Chief Minister said prolonged inaction under the BJP had created the current crisis and accused opposition leaders of misleading students for political gains.

He said only 5,000 jobs were filled in 3 years under BJP. The Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured the protsesters of expediting the process within the legal framework and also elaborating on the reasons for the delay in recruitment.

Responding to the BJP's support, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "Why didn't the BJP fill the vacancies? We are addressing them. Realising the employment problem, we are providing Rs 3,000 under the Yuva Nidhi scheme for unemployed graduates and inviting applications."

Shivakumar added that details regarding vacancies in his department have been shared with the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC).

He accused BJP leaders of "misleading students for political gains" and said recruitment irregularities and alleged corruption between 2019 and 2023 had eroded trust in the system, leading to the current crisis.

The opposition slammed the Congress government.

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka, who reached Dharwad, said over 2.5 lakh posts remain vacant.

"It's been more than six months since the Finance Department issued orders to fill 65,000 posts, but not a single interview call has been issued. This is an anti-youth government," he claimed.

State BJP president BY Vijayendra charged that the government has not filled even a single post and highlighted Rahul Gandhi's pre-election promise to fill 2.5 lakh vacancies.

He also cited the Congress manifesto, which pledged to fill approved vacancies within one year.

Dharwad came to a halt on Tuesday as agitators blocked roads, burnt posters and banners, and gheraoed the police and Opposition leaders. *X/@SIDDARAMAIAH*

Union Minister and JD(S) second-in-command HD Kumaraswamy criticised the government for failing to fill posts in a timely manner, forcing youths to protest.

"My only appeal to the youth is this: let your protest remain peaceful — I stand with you," he said in a social media post.

- State BJP president BY Vijayendra charged that the government has not filled even a single post and highlighted Rahul Gandhi's pre-election promise to fill 2.5 lakh vacancies.

'GO BACK' SLOGANS

The protestors were also upset with BJP leaders who came to express solidarity with them after giving a call for protest in support of them.

The protestors raised "Go Back" slogans against Leaders of Opposition in the Assembly and Council R Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy and Deputy Leader of Opposition Arvind Bellad.

Some of them even threw the torn-up posters on them. The protestors were in no mood to listen to the words of Ashok and Narayanaswamy. *—PTI*

MAN HELD FOR PREVENTING DALIT COUPLE FROM ENTERING TEMPLE

TUMAKURU, 24 FEB

A 70-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly preventing a Dalit couple from entering a temple in Gonitumkur village, under the Turuvekere police station limits, police said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred on the afternoon of 19 February. According to police, the accused allegedly shouted at the couple around 1pm, claiming to be "possessed by a deity", and barred them from entering the temple.

Acting on information about the alleged caste-based discrimination, police registered an FIR under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, along with relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Superintendent of Police Ashok Venkat said the accused has been arrested and remanded to judicial custody pending further proceedings. Police later ensured the couple were able to complete their darshan at the temple. *—PTI*

Koppal ryots protest against steel plant expansion

KOPPAL, 24 FEB

A massive protest was held in Koppal district as farmers opposed the expansion of the Baldota Factory, saying that the existing steel plant has already caused immense environmental and agricultural harm. Dust and smoke from the factory has been destroying the local system, they said, as a bandh was observed in several parts of the districts.

Farmers from the Halivarthi area brought bullock carts loaded with withered crops as the demonstrators marched from the Gavi Mut and proceeded through the city's major roads. Along with farmers, seers have also spearheaded the movement.

The protest procession featured more than 50 tractors, over 20 bullock carts, and hundreds of bikes in a rally.

EMPTY CRADLES AND OXYGEN MASKS

In a striking form of protest, several women carried empty cradles, alleging that pollution from the factories has led to infertility and miscarriages. Some women "claimed they had suffered abortions and lamented that they were unable to bear children due to the toxic environment."

Manjunath, a farmer from Hirebaganal also wore an oxygen mask during the protest, highlighting the impact of air pollution. Protesters also carried out a mock funereal.

OLD PROTEST, NEW FLAME

The stir against the Baldota Factory is not new. On 24 February, 2025, a similar bandh was organised under the leadership of Sri Gavisid deshwara Mahaswamiji. The concerns were the same: factories around Koppal were damaging the environment and air quality. The District Bachao Andolana Samiti and environmental protection groups carried out a continuous protest for 116 days.

Farmers from the Halivarthi area marched from the Gavi Mut area and proceeded through major roads *—SALAR*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah backed the local's concerns and questioned why the Centre had given the environmental clearance for the factory after various district representatives across party lines met him. However, at the 2025 Global Investors Meet in Bengaluru, the Baldota Group announced plans to invest Rs 54,000 crore to establish an integrated steel plant under its subsidiary, Baldota Steel and Power Ltd (BSPL) in Kopal taluk. The plant aims to have an annual production capacity of 10.5 million tonnes.

- The protest procession featured more than 50 tractors, over 20 bullock carts, and hundreds of bikes in a rally.

Organisers of the Koppal District Conveners Bachao Movement (Save Koppal Movement) and Environmental Protection Forum told Salar News that were opposing the expansion of the Baldota plant.

"The protest, led by the Joint Action Forum, demands that 44.35 acres of Basapur Lake be kept open for public use and new factories be stopped," noted activist Allamaprabhu Bettaduru and organisers Mallikarjun B Gonab and Manjunath G Gondaval said.

The Baldota Group was established in 1961 by Abheraj Hirachand Baldota. Narendrakumar A Baldota serves as the Chairman and Managing Director and Rahul Kumar Baldota and Shrenik Kumar N Baldota serve as the Joint Managing Directors. *—Salar News*

Prohibitory orders extended in Bagalkot

BAGALKOT, 24 FEB

Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) have been extended in Bagalkot's Old City area until 28 February 2026.

Superintendent of Police Siddharth Goyal confirmed the extension, stating that Section 163 will remain enforced within a four-kilometre radius of the Old City in Bagalkot to maintain law and order.

He urged the public to uphold peace and communal harmony, warning that no protests would be permitted in the area. Goyal also clarified that strict legal action would be taken against any violations, including protests, processions, or public meetings planned for 26 February.

The police official highlighted the importance of peace, especially with the upcoming Primary Urban Course (PUC) examinations beginning on 28 February. He appealed to avoid rumours and misinformation, assuring that necessary security measures had been implemented to prevent inconvenience to traders and the public. This extension follows a recent incident during Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti celebrations, where stone pelting and slipper throwing occurred during a procession, leading to eight arrests and an FIR. The police confirmed that the disturbance did not halt the procession, and the prime suspect, Tanveer Hawaldar, was among those detained. *—ANI*

- The police official highlighted the importance of peace, especially with the upcoming PUC examinations beginning on 28 February.

KSRTC to give free driving training to minorities

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) is expanding a scheme which provided free light/heavy vehicle driving training and licensing to members of the Scheduled Caste community to include people from the minority communities Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Parsi provided that they are aged between 18 and 45 years and have passed SSLC.

In a press release on Tuesday, the KSRTC noted that the PM Ajay scheme, in collaboration the Karnataka Welfare Department, had trained 500 beneficiaries of the Scheduled Castes and received a positive response. Hence, the Director, Directorate of Minorities has announced that it will provide funding to provide heavy/light vehicle driving training to candidates from minority communities and issue licenses in collaboration with the Transport Department. One-month free training will be provided to those interested. They will also get free food and accommodation for 14 days. Interested candidates can register at nearest training centres in Malavalli, Malur, Hassan, Chikmagalur and Holalkere. *—SALAR NEWS*

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BRICS cooperation vital for developing quantum tech: Boseraju

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

Calling for stronger global collaboration in emerging technologies, Karnataka Minister NS Boseraju on Tuesday urged BRICS nations to work together to accelerate the development of quantum technologies.

Speaking at a high-level meeting at Vidhana Soudha with a Brazilian delegation led by Esther Dweck (**in pic**), the Brazilian Minister of Management and Innovation in Public Services, Boseraju proposed convening a BRICS Quantum Summit to institutionalise cooperation.

He said the other international groupings, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), are already organising dedicated quantum summits.

"BRICS must collaborate to harness quantum technology in areas like agriculture, pharmaceutical research, water resource management, climate forecasting, and flood mitigation. A BRICS Quantum Summit could serve as a platform to jointly address developmental challenges," he said in a statement.

The BRICS includes Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates.

Highlighting Karnataka's achievements, Boseraju said the state is home to India's "first indigenously built" commercial

UP IN FLAMES

At least 30 seized vehicles were gutted in a blaze near Banaswadi Police Station, in Bengaluru, on Tuesday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

CM urges parents, schools to monitor kids closely amid rise in hate crimes

>>>More on Page 1

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged parents to closely monitor their children's activities and guide them away from harmful influences, warning of the dangers of growing hatred and criminal tendencies among youth.

This was after the murder of 16-year-old Sanketh outside a government school in Sulaebailu.

Siddaramaiah appealed to school authorities to remain vigilant, prevent unlawful activities in and around campuses, and seek police assistance when necessary. He announced that the government would provide Rs 15 lakh in compensation to the deceased student's parents and assured that all necessary steps would be taken to ensure strict punishment for the accused.

Siddaramaiah also called on the public to maintain peace and avoid provocations, warning that strict action would be taken against anyone attempting to disturb public order.

Expressing concern that the perpetrators were young boys, he said, "Children who should be focusing on education and shaping their future have instead fallen prey to harmful influences and engaged in unlawful acts. This is both tragic and alarming." He directed the police to take stringent action and ensure the law deals firmly with the offenders.

Meanwhile, BJP State President BY Vijayendra condemned the murder, calling it a brutal incident. Criticising the Congress government, he highlighted similar recent incidents in Shivamogga, Dakshina Kannada, and Yellapur, including stone pelting during the Shivaji Jayanti procession and the murder of a Dalit woman in Yellapur. He questioned whether Home Minister G Parameshwara was effectively in charge, accusing him of giving routine answers to serious concerns. *—PTI*

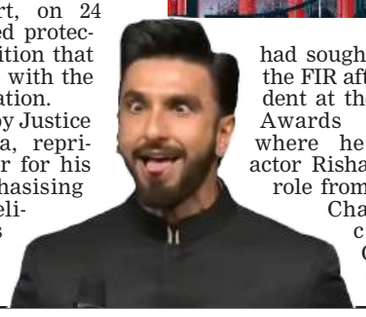
'KANTARA' MIMICRY TROUBLE

Karnataka HC stays coercive action against Ranveer Singh

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

The Karnataka High Court in the City has ordered the police not to take coercive steps against Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh in connection with an FIR over alleged derogatory remarks about a deity. The court, on 24 February, granted protection on the condition that Singh cooperates with the ongoing investigation.

The bench, led by Justice M Nagaprasanna, reprimanded the actor for his behaviour, emphasising that hurting religious sentiments would not be tolerated. Singh had sought to quash the FIR after an incident at the Filmfare Awards in Goa, where he imitated actor Rishab Shetty's role from 'Kantara: Chapter 1,' calling Goddess Chavundi a ghost.



An FIR was lodged by the High Grounds police based on a complaint that his remarks on the film 'Kantara' had hurt religious sentiments. The court observed that whether Singh was aware of the context or not, he should not have acted insensitively. The bench stated that public figures must consider the impact of their words, emphasising that "the internet won't forget."

The case relates to Singh's remarks during IFFI 2025, where he allegedly mocked the deity Chamundi, which some viewed as disrespectful. The High Court had adjourned the further hearing to 2 March. *—PTI*

— PTI

Shankaracharya seeks anticipatory bail in POCSO case

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 FEB

Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati has approached the Allahabad High Court seeking anticipatory bail after an FIR was lodged against him over alleged sexual harassment of minors. The case was registered at Jhunsi police station in Prayagraj against Saraswati and his disciple, Mukundanand Brahmachari, following allegations of repeated sexual abuse of two individuals, including a minor, over the past year. The complaint, filed by Ashutosh Brahmachari Maharaj and others, alleges the incidents occurred at a gurukul and during religious gatherings, including the recent Magh Mela. Saraswati has denied the claims, stating he is target of a conspiracy involving the police. He alleged that officials began acting against him after a dispute with Mela. —*PTI*

Fadnavis warns courier firms against drug trade

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday unveiled tougher measures against drug trafficking and repeated violations by orchestra bars, reaffirming his government's "zero tolerance" stance. Addressing the Maharashtra Assembly, he said narcotics offences have been brought under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, allowing property seizure and stricter prosecution. Courier services used to transport drugs will be treated as co-accused, while social media platforms are being misused as marketplaces. Between January and 11 February, police registered 93 cases, arrested 112 people and seized drugs worth Rs 7.93 crore. He also said orchestra bar licences will be permanently cancelled for repeat breaches. —*PTI*

Centre approves 5,000 homes for IDPs in Manipur

IMPHAL, 24 FEB

Shivraj Singh Chouhan has approved the construction of 5,000 homes for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Manipur under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana - Gramin. The decision followed a meeting in New Delhi with Chief Minister N. Biren Singh. The houses will rehabilitate families affected by ethnic violence that has continued since May 2023. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in clashes between the Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and the hills-based Kuki-Zo groups. In January, it announced plans to resettle 10,000 displaced families by 31 March, adding that 16,500 IDPs have already been resettled across the state. —*PTI*

Nitish loses his cool in Bihar Assembly

PATNA, 24 FEB

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar lost his composure in the Bihar Assembly on Tuesday as Opposition members accused his government of running a "rule of guns and bullets". The CM, reacting angrily, pointed to the NDA's brute majority but misspoke, saying, "Our strength is two thousand and two," instead of 202 seats in the 243-member House secured in the last election. The uproar began after RJD MLA Kumar Sarvajeet protested against a police baton charge on village chowkidars demanding higher stipends. Opposition raised slogans, prompting Kumar to defend his record and criticise the RJD's past governance, citing poor law and order. The turmoil eased after Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary assured talks with chowkidar representatives. —*PTI*

IYC National Prez jailed over 'shirtless' protest

8 IYC members held so far; Cong says protest will continue

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) members protest against the arrest of IYC President Uday Bhanu Chib (centre) over the shirtless protest at the AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi, on Tuesday —*PTI*

The Congress party on Tuesday strongly condemned the police action and arrest of its youth wing president Uday Bhanu Chib and other workers with former party chief Rahul Gandhi alleging that the action was reflective of "dictatorial tendencies and cowardice".

Delhi Police has added charges of rioting against the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) members arrested in connection with the shirtless protest during the AI Summit here last week, an official said on Tuesday.

Eight IYC members, including its president, have been arrested so far. Police have added sections 191(1) (rioting) and 192 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot- if rioting be committed; if not committed) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in the case.

Addressing a press conference, Special Commissioner of Police (Crime and Police Management & Media Cell) Devesh Chandra Srivastva described the accused as 'aggressive elements' and said that a premeditated attempt was made to breach the security cordon in the presence of dignitaries, delegates and visitors attending the international event.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, while talking to the media, said, "The youth today are desperate for jobs, and the environment in the country has deteriorated so much that people are very angry with PM Modi. I wanted PM Modi to do something good for the country, but he has destroyed the country. He has bowed down to President Trump."

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the party will continue exposing the government for the "blatant lies it propagates" and used the acronym "MODI - Murder of Democracy in India" to take a swipe at the PM. —*PTI*

1ST SEVA TEERTH MEETING

Rs 12,236 cr infra projects cleared

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

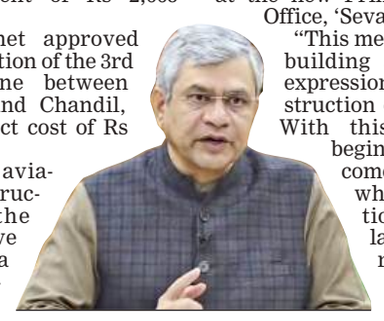
- Under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this was the first meeting of the Union Cabinet held at 'Seva Teerth'.

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday has approved a series of infrastructure and policy decisions, including major investments in railways, urban transport, and aviation, with a total financial outlay of Rs 12,236 crore.

Additionally, the Cabinet took policy decisions on power sector reforms and approved the change of name from Kerala to Keralam.

While announcing the Cabinet decision, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, "Among the key approvals, the Cabinet cleared the doubling of the Gondia-Jabalpur rail line at an estimated cost of Rs 5,236 crore. It also sanctioned the 3rd and 4th rail line project between Punarkh and Kiul, involving an investment of Rs 2,668 crore."

The Cabinet approved the construction of the 3rd and 4th line between Gamharia and Chandil, with a project cost of Rs 1,168 crore.



Boosting aviation infrastructure, the Cabinet gave its nod for a new integrated airport terminal at Srinagar, entailing an expenditure of Rs 1,667 crore, the minister told.

The Cabinet also approved the extension of Phase 2B of the Ahmedabad Metro project, with an allocation of Rs 1,067 crore.

Further, the Cabinet approved the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for raw jute, involving a financial implication of Rs 430 crore.

Under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this was the first meeting of the Union Cabinet held at the new Prime Minister's Office, 'Seva Teerth'.

"This meeting and this building are a direct expression of the reconstruction of New India. With this auspicious beginning, we welcome that future whose foundation has been laid by centuries of effort," Vaishnaw said. —*ANI*

Jaya aide Sasikala unveils flag, to launch party soon

RAMANATHAPURAM, 24 FEB

VK Sasikala —*ANI*

> "I will soon announce the name of the new party, there is no change in it. It will function as a party that defeats opponents and betrayers"

VK Sasikala, confidante of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa on Tuesday announced the launch of a new political party asserting that, "we are going to witness a new political chapter."

Addressing an event to mark the birth anniversary of Jayalalithaa at Kamuthi near here, the late Chief Minister's close aide declared: "I will soon announce the name of the new party, there is no change in it. It will function as a party that defeats opponents and betrayers alike; we are going to witness a new (political) chapter."

Her foray with a new party could well result in a four-cornered electoral contest in the state Assembly polls, due in April, with the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance on one side and the AIADMK-headed NDA on the other. Actor Vijay's TVK is making its electoral debut in the hustings slated in about two months.

On Tuesday, Sasikala unveiled the flag of the to-be named party and it features the images of Dravidian icon CN Annadurai, AIADMK founder MG Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa.

The flag is a horizontal tricolour of black on top, white on middle and red on the bottom.

Amid speculation that she may launch a new party and ahead of the anniversary event, Sasikala had asserted that she would soon, "give good news."

Sasikala launched a scathing attack on her former colleague and AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami (EPS), accusing him of betrayal and claiming the party had declined under his leadership. —*PTI/ANI*

COUNTDOWN TO TN POLLS

AIADMK unveils third phase of poll promises

CHENNAI, 24 FEB

AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami announced the party's third phase of election promises ahead of the upcoming Assembly election.

The party will offer a one-time ex-gratia of Rs 10,000 to each family, aiming to ease hardships caused by the recent surge in essential commodity prices during the DMK regime.

On the occasion of late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's birth anniversary, Palaniswami also announced a monthly stipend of Rs 2,000 for degree holders registered with employment exchanges and awaiting jobs, and Rs 1,000 for those who studied up to Plus Two.

He further announced increased relief for fishermen, raising support from Rs 8,000 to Rs 12,000 during the ban period; a Pongal festival gift of Rs 1,000 to ration cardholders; free power up to 450 units for handloom weavers and 1,400 units for powerloom weavers; and waiver of cooperative bank loans for small traders with shops on city sidewalks.

Speaking at the AIADMK headquarters, Palaniswami highlighted the hardships faced over the past five years, citing increased taxes and tariffs. He said all schemes would be implemented if AIADMK returned to power, boosting state revenue. Additionally, he announced 10 assurances, including increasing aid for women-headed families to Rs 2,000 monthly. —*PTI*

EC, SECs to synergise laws for local, LS polls

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Election Commission (EC) and state poll panels resolved on Tuesday to work together to synergise laws regarding local body polls with those about Parliament and state legislature elections.

A declaration adopted at a conference of the Election Commission and state poll panels here stated that "in national and constitutional interest, the EC has suggested to work out mutually acceptable mechanisms and legally viable frameworks to synergise with all SECs for all possible election processes, including the sharing of ECINET, EVMs, and electoral rolls."

It said that the EC and State Election Commissions (SEC) will work together to "synergise" laws regarding elections to panchayats and municipal bodies with those regarding elections to Parliament and state legislatures.

The Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, termed direct elections where voters elect their representative, are governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and 1951, and relevant rules.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said that the EC and SECs should work together, keeping the elector in mind. — *PTI*

Kerala Assembly sets aside Guv's letters to Speaker

T'PURAM/NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Kerala assembly on Tuesday decided that there was no need to take up for consideration the letters to the Speaker by Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar demanding that the policy address as read by him should be considered as the official version.

Speaker AN Shamseer ruled that there was no need to consider the Governor's letters based on Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's submissions on the issue.

Vijayan said, in the House, that there have been instances in the past where Governors have sought clarifications or indicated their difference of opinion with certain portions of the policy address by writing to the CM.

He further said that this time, the Governor did not by any means inform the CM about his difference of opinion regarding any portion of the policy address. He said that a Governor unilaterally changing a policy address approved by the cabinet and then reading it in the House has never happened before.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court stayed the Kerala High Court decision which set aside an order authorising Rs 20 crore for Nava Kerala Citizen Response Programme. —*PTI*

T'gana: Top Maoist leader surrenders

HYDERABAD, 24 FEB

Top Maoist commander and the key "strategist" of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit, Thippiri Tirupati, also known as Devuji, surrendered before the Telangana police on Tuesday, after spending over four decades of underground life, police said.

Devuji, a key Central Committee member of the proscribed organisation and the politburo member of the Maoist party, along with another central committee member Malla Raji Reddy, formally surrendered in the presence of state DGP B Shivadhar Reddy.

Replying to the query, Devuji said he surrendered due to health issues and vowed to continue his political career within "legal framework". —*PTI*

No files signed on Ajit's death day: M'rashtra Minority dept

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Maharashtra's Minority Development Department clarified that no new files were digitally signed, nor were any minority status certificates issued, on 28 January, the day deputy chief minister **Ajit Pawar** died in a plane crash.

The department's statement follows controversy over the rapid granting of minority status to 75 educational institutions after Pawar's death, when he was overseeing the department.

Minority status offers significant benefits, including exemptions from certain Right to Education provisions, such as the 25 per cent reservation for weaker sections, along with grants and autonomy in internal management.

Pawar and four others died in a plane crash in Baramati, Pune district, on 28 January.

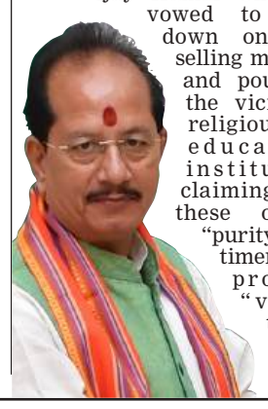
It stressed that the process is online, transparent, and follows the Government Resolution of 27 May, 2013, with applications scrutinised at district level. The department rejected allegations of irregularity, calling them "completely baseless," and announced a high-level inquiry into the approvals granted that week.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Fadnavis and Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar ordered a comprehensive report. —*PTI*

'AFFECTS THE PURITY'

'Meat shops near schools, temples spur violent tendencies'

PATNA, 24 FEB



Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha has vowed to clamp down on shops selling meat, fish and poultry in the vicinity of religious and educational institutions, claiming that these offended "purity of sentiments" and promoted "violent tendencies" among children.

The senior BJP leader, who holds the urban development portfolio in the Nitish Kumar government, made a statement to this effect a couple of days ago when his views were sought on a recent circular issued by the department.

"We are making a new Bihar and this is being reflected in all the steps we take. I issued directions to strictly implement the rules in a recent departmental meeting, which have been framed to ensure proper hygiene and social harmony," he said.

"We are not against people's right to have food of their choice. But, selling such items in the open, especially in the vicinity of religious institutions, adversely affects the purity of our sentiments. Similarly, these need to be kept away from educational institutions to prevent violent tendencies among children," Sinha said.

A senior department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the rules have been in force "for years".

"Shops of meat, fish and poultry in the vicinity of such places run illegally. We do not wish to comment on the reasons that may have led to such rules but, yes, there has been a recent thrust on enforcement of these," he said. —*PTI*

'Syndicates used adulterated ghee in Tirupati laddus'

AMARAVATI, 24 FEB

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu accused organised syndicates of using nearly 60 lakh kilograms of adulterated ghee to produce over 20 crore consecrated laddus for temple, calling it a "sacrilege."

Naidu claimed that during the YSRCP regime, these syndicates compromised the sacred prasadam, hurting devotees' sentiments.

Naidu stated that Rs 234.51 crore was spent by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on adulterated ghee, and accused the previous government of "committing sacrilege by adulterating the laddu in an organised crime."

He also pointed out attacks on temples during the YSRCP rule between 2019 and 2014. —*PTI*

Canada moves to revoke Rana's citizenship: Report

TORONTO/NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Ahead of Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to India, the Canadian government is pushing to revoke the citizenship of a Pakistan-born businessman, Tahawwur Rana Hussain, accused of playing a key role in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack.

Rana, 64, is a Pakistan-born Canadian national and close associate of one of the main conspirators of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, David Coleman Headley, a US citizen.

Documents obtained by Global News show that immigration officials have notified Rana that they intend to strip him of the Canadian citizenship he acquired in 2001.

Rana, the mastermind behind the 26/11 attack, which killed 166 people, was extradited from the US to India in April 2025.

In its decision, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada wrote that Rana's citizenship was being revoked not for terrorism, but rather because he lied on his application form, the report added.

MODI GOVT ABANDONED PALESTINIANS: CONG

The Congress General Secretary in-charge Communications Jairam Ramesh alleged that the government has "abandoned" the Palestinians and said PM Narendra Modi is going to Israel despite that its attacks on civilians in Gaza continuing "mercilessly". —*PTI*

—PTI

Army dog Tyson is stable after bullet injury

JAMMU, 24 FEB

Army dog Tyson is recovering after being shot while leading troops during Operation Trashi-I in Kishtwar district, officials said. The German Shepherd took the first bullet as he spearheaded the assault on a terrorist hideout in Passerkut, Chatroo belt, on Sunday. Despite being wounded in a front leg, Tyson continued advancing, forcing the militants to open fire and exposing their position. His actions enabled the Army's White Knight Corps, along with police and the CRPF, to neutralise Jaish-e-Mohammad commander Saifullah and two associates. Tyson was airlifted to a veterinary hospital, where he is alert and in high spirits. —*PTI*

Man's wife, daughter beat him to death, held

BAREILLY, 24 FEB

A woman and her daughter have been arrested for allegedly beating a man to death following a domestic dispute in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, police said. Rekha, 46, and her daughter Pinky, 30 were taken into custody after the death of Balkaram, 48 in the Izzatnagar area on Sunday. Police said Balkaram had attended a pre-wedding function where he consumed alcohol and later argued with the two women at home. He was allegedly assaulted with sticks. The accused initially claimed he had fallen down the stairs, but a post-mortem found around 15 injuries and concluded he died of shock and haemorrhage.—*PTI*

Fight over cricket kills Delhi teenager

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

A cricket dispute turned fatal in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area with the death of a 15-year-old boy in a scuffle with three juveniles, police said on Tuesday. A verbal duel broke out on Monday between a 12-year-old boy and the 15-year-old victim over a game of cricket in a local park. "The argument soon escalated into a fight. The 12-year-old returned home and narrated the incident to his cousins, aged 17 and 13," an officer said. A fight broke out, and the teenager was injured on his neck and fell unconscious. He was rushed to Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) Hospital, where he was declared dead. —*PTI*

—PTI

Man booked for triple talaq on phone in Kerala

KOCHI, 24 FEB

A 32-year-old man has been booked for allegedly pronouncing triple talaq over the phone and subjecting his wife to cruelty, police said on Tuesday. The case was registered on Monday at Muvattupuzha police station under Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which addresses cruelty by a husband or relatives. It was also registered under Sections 3 and 4 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, which makes talaq void and illegal, with prescribed punishments. The accused, Suhail from Karthikappally taluk in Alappuzha district, married the woman on 18 September 2016 as per Muslim customs. The complaint states that after marriage, Suhail demanded dowry forcing the woman to live in hostels. On 21 May 2025, he sent an SMS claiming to have divorced her by pronouncing talaq. —*PTI*

Kerala wrongly depicted in 'The Kerala Story 2': HC

High Court to decide today on viewing controversial film

KOCHI, 24 FEB

The Kerala High Court observed on Tuesday that 'The Kerala Story 2 – Goes Beyond' film depicts a state like Kerala where everyone lives in communal harmony in a wrong light.

The court also observed that using the state's name and claiming that the film is based on true facts can lead to communal tensions in the state.

The observations came from Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas while hearing arguments on three pleas seeking to quash the certificate for public viewing granted to 'The Kerala Story 2 - Goes Beyond.'

When the matter came up again in the post lunch session, the court was told that the producers of the film were willing to withdraw the film's teasers.

The court said it will hear the matter again on Wednesday when it is likely to decide whether to see the movie before its release on 27 February.

The court said that using the state's name and claiming that the film is based on true facts can spark tensions in the state — *SCREENGRAB*

Earlier in the day, during the arguments, the court indicated it was inclined to watch the film before passing an order.

It also asked the censor board whether the movie complies with mandatory guidelines.

One of the three pleas has been moved by Sreedev Namboodiri of Kannavam in Kannur district, who has arrayed the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the CBFC, and producer Vipul Amrutlal Shah as respondents.

Besides quashing of its certification, Namboodiri's petition also seeks certain modifications, including reconsideration of its title.

The petitioner claimed that the film was certified for public viewing by the CBFC without complying with the Cinematograph Act, 1952.

The grievance arises from the teaser and trailer of the film, which portray women from many states, but brand the content as 'The Kerala Story', thereby associating terrorism, forced conversion and demographic aggression with Kerala. — *PTI*

Police personnel detain Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) activists after they came to Lal Baradari mosque to chant the Hanuman Chalisa, at the University of Lucknow, Tuesday —*PTI*

ABVP holds prayers at Lucknow University after namaz row

LUCKNOW, 24 FEB

Police detained several people after tensions flared on Tuesday at Lucknow University when ABVP members tried to confront the recent offering of namaz by reciting Hanuman Chalisa near the Laal Baradari mosque on the campus.

Officials said ABVP activists assembled near the Laal Baradari area and raised the slogan "Jai Shri Ram."

Visuals showed police repeatedly stopping the protesters from advancing further.

The protesters later sat on a road in front of the mosque and began reciting the Hanuman Chalisa, demanding "shuddhikaran" (purification) of the place where namaz was allegedly offered a few days ago.

Police detained some of the protesters, who were seated inside a bus parked on the campus and then taken to police lines.

Videos also showed a few protesters being forcibly removed from the campus.

Lucknow University Proctor Rakesh Dwivedi said, "We are talking to students and will sort this out." On being asked about the namaz controversy, he said, "We have provided everything about it to the police."

NSUI's Uttar Pradesh vice president Aryan Mishra had claimed that the Laal Baradari mosque inside the university was locked on Saturday.

Muslim students conducted namaz there on Sunday with NSUI volunteers guarding them, he said.

Mishra said that Muslims students pray at the mosque while Hindu students pray at a temple near gate number 1.

An ABVP office-bearer had earlier warned that if namaz was allowed inside the university campus, they would chant the Hanuman Chalisa there. — *PTI*

Andhra deaths: Coolant leak may have poisoned milk

RAJAVARAM, 24 FEB

The police said on Tuesday that a chemical coolant leak from the freezer of a vendor may have resulted in the death of four people here who allegedly consumed the "contaminated" milk.

After consuming the contaminated milk, four people died in the last two days and 12 were hospitalised. The contaminated milk caused kidney failure, leading to sudden urinary blockage and death.

The samples collected from the storage unit and milk supplied have been sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in Vijayawada for scientific examination.

"The milk was stored in a freezer at the accused's residence and we suspect that coolant might have leaked into it. All samples have been sent to the FSL," East Godavari SP D Narasimha Kishore said.

The SP said the vendor stored milk at his house in a freezer with two containers, besides filling six cans from storage tanks for distribution.

A few cans were also filled with freshly collected milk before being supplied to customers. It is suspected that a can containing contaminated milk may have been delivered to the households where deaths were reported.

The accused vendor has been taken into custody and the dairy unit linked to the supply has been sealed. — *PTI*

Security officials and people gather near the wreckage of the Redbird Airways Beechcraft C90 air ambulance on Tuesday —*PTI*

Crash: Jet tried to change route

RANCHI, 24 FEB

The Ranchi-New Delhi air ambulance, carrying a patient, which crashed in Jharkhand's Chatra on Monday night had requested a change in route due to bad weather.

Chatra Deputy Commissioner Keerthishree G confirmed the death of all the seven passengers.

The dead are 41-year-old Sanjay Kumar, the patient who was being transported for treatment with 63 per cent burn injuries, Dr Vikas Kumar Gupta, paramedic Sachin Kumar Mishra, two attendants, Archana Devi and Dhuru Kumar, and two crew members, Vivek Vikas Bhagat and Savrajdeep Singh, both captains.

The Beechcraft C90 aircraft VT-AJV, operated by Delhi-based Redbird Airways Pvt Ltd, took off from Ranchi's Birsa Munda Airport at 7:11pm, according to a DGCA statement.

The DGCA stated that the aircraft "requested for deviation due to weather" after establishing contact with Kolkata. At 7:34pm, the air ambulance lost communication and radar contact with Kolkata at approximately 100 NM South-East of Varanasi.

After losing contact with Kolkata, VT-AJV did not come in contact with either Varanasi ATC or the Lucknow ATC.A Varanasi radar replay was carried out, following which the last radar contact was recorded at 7:22 pm.

Ranchi airport director Vinod Kumar said inclement weather could be a reason for the crash. However, the actual reason will be known only after the investigation, he added. — *PTI*

Copter crashes near Andaman, everyone rescued

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 24 FEB

A Pawan Hans helicopter carrying seven people, including two crew members, crashed into the sea after it took off from Rangat in the North and Middle Andaman district on Tuesday, and they were rescued, officials said. The accident occurred around 9.30 am. All five passengers and the crew were rescued and have been hospitalised. —*PTI*

Bad weather: BA Hyd flight goes to Nagpur

NAGPUR, 24 FEB

A Hyderabad-bound British Airways flight from London was diverted to Nagpur early Tuesday due to bad weather, an official said. Passengers were de-boarded from the aircraft. It is now grounded at Nagpur airport, the official said. The aircraft was diverted to Nagpur due to bad weather and poor visibility in Hyderabad, he said. —*PTI*

Leh-bound SpiceJet flight returns to New Delhi due to tech glitch

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

A Leh-bound SpiceJet aircraft returned here due to an engine issue on Tuesday morning. There were around 150 people on board the Boeing 737 aircraft (flight SG121), the source added. A SpiceJet spokesperson said a flight operating from Delhi to Leh on Tuesday returned to Delhi after a technical issue. "The aircraft landed safely in Delhi, and all passengers disembarked normally and safely," the spokesperson said. There was no fire warning in the cockpit, he added. — PTI

5 KIDS AMONG 6 DEAD IN MEERUT BLAZE

MEERUT, 24 FEB

Six people, including five children, were killed and a woman was injured after a devastating fire tore through a house in the Lisadi Gate area of Meerut on Monday.

Police said the blaze broke out at around 8 pm in Kidwai Nagar and is suspected to have been caused by a short circuit. The are Rukhsar, 25, Mahbish, 12, Hammad,4, Akdas,4, and four-month-old twins Nabia and Inayat. Ameer Bano, 55, is receiving treatment for burns.

Seven people were taken to hospital, where six later died. Fire crews faced difficulties accessing the narrow lanes and deployed motorcycles to reach the scene. Four fire engines were pressed into service.

Authorities said tailoring was being carried out in the property, and the large stock of cloth fuelled the flames. A detailed inquiry has been orde red. — *PTI*

People inspect the fire scene in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut on Monday —*PTI*

All Keralites will now get nativity cards

T'PURAM, 24 FEB

The Kerala government on Tuesday passed the Nativity Card Bill in the Assembly, as the Congress-led Opposition protested and staged a walkout. The government said the new legislation will allow people to identify themselves as Keralites through the nativity card. Finance Minister KN Balagopal described the passage of the Bill as a "historic moment," asserting that it aims to safeguard minority communities.

He criticised the Congress-led UDF for staying away from the proceedings, claiming they intended to create controversy rather than engage in the legislative process.

Revenue Minister K Rajan said the legislation comes against the backdrop of the Centre implementing the CAA "unilaterally" —*PTI*

The UDF had boycotted Tuesday's session over the Sabarimala gold loss case, during which the Nativity Card Bill was introduced in the absence of Opposition legislators. The Nativity Card Bill gives legal backing to the state government's decision, approved in December 2025, to introduce a permanent, photo-embedded nativity card.

Introducing the Bill on Monday, Revenue Minister K Rajan said the legislation comes against the backdrop of the Centre implementing the CAA "unilaterally."

A "native of Kerala" means individuals born in the state, those with at least one ancestor born in Kerala, or those born outside the state while their parents were working elsewhere. —*ANI*

GRAFT, SHORTAGE OF JUDGES

NCERT textbook lists judiciary's drawbacks

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Corruption, massive backlog of cases, and lack of adequate number of judges are among the "challenges" faced by the judicial system, according to the NCERT's new social science textbook for class 8.

The section "corruption in the judiciary" in the new book states that judges are bound by a code of conduct that governs not only their behaviour in court, but also how they conduct themselves outside it.

The revised chapter, titled 'The Role of the Judiciary in Our Society,' goes beyond explaining the hierarchy of courts and access to justice, and addresses challenges faced by the judicial system.

The earlier editions of the textbook largely focused on the structure and role of courts.

The section "corruption in the judiciary" in the new textbook states that judges are bound by a code of conduct —*ANI*

The book pegs the approximate number of pending cases in the Supreme Court at 81,000, in high courts at 62.40 lakh, and district and subordinate courts at 4.70 crore.

It highlights the judiciary's internal accountability mechanisms and refers to the established procedure for receiving complaints through the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS).

The book says that around 1,600 complaints were received through this mechanism between 2017 and 2021.

The textbook also quotes former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai, who said in July 2025 that corruption and misconduct within the judiciary had a negative impact on public confidence.

"However, the path to rebuilding this trust lies in swift, decisive action to address and resolve these issues," he is quoted as saying in the book. — *PTI*

Hyd police arrest 104 in anti-cybercrime drive

HYDERABAD, 24 FEB

Hyderabad Police have launched a major operation against cyber fraud, arresting 104 individuals across 16 states. The crackdown, called 'Operation Octopus', targeted a pan-India syndicate linked to 1,055 cyber fraud cases involving approximately Rs 127 crore.

Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar said the arrests included 86 mule account holders, 17 account suppliers or aggregators, and one bank Relationship Manager who colluded with criminals to facilitate fraudulent accounts and fund transfers.

The surge in investment scams, trading frauds, and "Digital Arrest" scams has prompted the operation. Investigations uncovered a nexus of 151 bank accounts used to siphon victims' money.

—PTI

The operation involved 32 specialised teams working simultaneously across states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and others over ten days.

Police seized 204 mobile phones, 141 SIM cards, 152 bank passbooks, 234 debit/credit cards, 26 laptops, 56 stamps, and Rs 36 lakhs cash. The ongoing investigation aims to dismantle higher-level syndicate members, with strict action against all involved. — *PTI*

STORM STRUCK NEW YORK

Heavy snow and strongwind brought daily life to a pause across New York City and parts of the northeastern US on Monday. Millions were urged to remain indoors as authorities warned of dangerous, near-impossible travel conditions — *SCREENGRAB*

SC rebuke of tariffs likely not an end to trade chaos

The Supreme Court's stunning rebuke of President Donald Trump's most sweeping tariffs means he can't conjure up new import taxes on a whim anymore.

But the justices' ruling on Friday is nonetheless unlikely to ease the uncertainty over Trump's trade policy that has paralysed businesses over the past year. "It's only gotten more complicated for everybody," said trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, partner at King & Spalding and a former US trade official.

Vexing questions remain: How will the president use other laws to reconstruct the tariffs the Supreme Court knocked down, and will those attempts withstand legal challenges? What does the decision mean for the trade deals Trump strong-armed other countries into accepting, using his now-defunct tariffs as leverage? Can importers collect refunds for the tariffs they paid last year, and if so, how?

Then there's Trump's own unpredictability. Even though he had weeks to prepare for an unfavourable Supreme Court ruling, his response was still chaotic: On Friday, he said he'd use other legal authority to impose 10 per cent levies on imports from other countries. Saturday, he ratcheted it up to 15 per cent.

Normally, lower tariffs arising from the Supreme Court's decision might be expected to give the economy a little lift.

Gone for good are the sweeping tariffs Trump justified under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), mainly to combat America's persistent trade deficits. But that doesn't mean the president can't invoke other laws to rebuild much of his tariff wall around the US economy.

Trump reached for a stopgap option immediately after his defeat Friday at the Supreme Court: Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 allows the president to impose tariffs of up to 15 per cent for up to 150 days.

But any extension beyond 150 days must be approved by a Congress likely to balk at passing a tax increase as November's midterm elections loom.

Normally, lower tariffs arising from the Supreme Court's decision might be expected to give the economy a little lift — *FREEPIK*

Section 122 has never been invoked before, and some critics say the president can't use it as a stand-in for the IEEPA tariffs to combat the trade deficit.

Bryan Riley of National Taxpayers Union, for example, argues that Section 122 is meant to give the president a tool to fight what it calls "fundamental international payments problems", not the trade deficit.

A sturdier alternative is Section 301 of the same 1974 trade act, which gives the US a handy cudgel with which to smack countries it accuses of engaging in "unjustifiable," "unreasonable" or "discriminatory" trade practices.

In a statement Friday, in fact, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said the administration was launching a series of 301 investigations after the loss at the Supreme Court.

Trump invoked Section 301 in his first term to impose sweeping tariffs on Chinese imports in a dispute over the sharp-elbowed tactics that Beijing was using to challenge America's technological dominance. Those tariffs were upheld in court and kept by the Biden administration.

The Supreme Court's decision also raises questions about the lopsided trade agreements Trump negotiated last year.

The European Union's trade deal with Trump is already on hold amid confusion following the Supreme Court's ruling: and Trump's decision to respond to it with the 15 per cent Section 122 global tariff.

European lawmakers on Monday delayed a vote on ratifying the pact to seek clarification. They are worried that Trump's new import tax will stack on top of the "most favoured nation" tariffs the US charges under pre-existing World Trade Organization rules: and lift US tariffs on EU imports above the 15 per cent the Europeans had agreed to last year.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court didn't bother to say what would happen to all the money collected from the IEEPA tariffs, $133 billion as of mid-December. It left the messy issue of refunds to importers: but likely not to consumers: to lower courts and the Customs and Border Protection agency, which collects import taxes.

But they're likely to be overwhelmed: hundreds of companies are already lined up to get their money back: and the refunds could take months or years to be paid.

"The whole thing's going to be a mess," Majerus said.

It's possible that Congress will order Customs to take an "easy one-click approach to refunds", wrote strategists Thierry Wizman and Gareth Berry at the investment bank Macquarie.

Otherwise, they warned, the Trump administration could "make the refund process as burdensome as possible, requiring every importer to file stacks of paperwork, if not file a lawsuit, to get its money back. That would be costly for businesses". —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR

A look at Iran's long timeline of nuke powerplay

Iran and the US are due to hold new talks in Geneva on Thursday over Tehran's nuclear programme.

The talks come as America has assembled the largest fleet of warplanes and aircraft in the Mideast in decades as part of President Donald Trump's efforts to force Iran into a deal after it saw nationwide protests against its theocracy.

Here's a timeline of the tensions over Iran's atomic programme:

1967: Iran takes possession of the Tehran Research Reactor supplied by the United States under the "Atoms for Peace" programme, laying the foundation for its civilian nuclear ambitions.

1979: Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi flees Iran amid mass protests. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returns from exile and the Islamic Revolution reshapes the country into a theocratic republic. Students seize the US Embassy in Tehran, triggering a 444-day hostage crisis. Iran's nuclear programme slows dramatically under revolutionary upheaval and mounting international pressure.

August 2002: Western intelligence agencies and an Iranian opposition group reveal the existence of Iran's secret Natanz uranium enrichment facility, raising global alarm over Tehran's nuclear intentions.

October 2003: Under pressure from Britain, France and Germany, Iran agrees to suspend uranium enrichment temporarily as negotiations intensify.

February 2006: Iran resumes uranium enrichment after the election of hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, escalating tensions with the West and setting the stage for years of sanctions.

October 2009: The United States and Iran open a secret back-channel in Oman during Barack Obama's presidency, marking the first sustained diplomatic contact in decades.

July 2012: US and Iranian officials hold clandestine face-to-face talks in Oman, paving the way for a formal nuclear agreement.

May 2018: President Donald Trump unilaterally withdraws the US from the 2015 nuclear deal, calling it the "worst deal ever," and reimposes sweeping sanctions on Tehran.

May 2019: Iran begins scaling back its commitments under the accord. A series of attacks across the Middle East, blamed on Tehran, heighten regional tensions.

January 2020: A US drone strike in Baghdad kills Gen Qassem Soleimani, the architect of Iran's regional military strategy. Days later, Iran fires missiles at US bases in Iraq, injuring more than 100 American service members. Amid heightened tensions, Iran's Revolutionary Guard shoots down a Ukrainian passenger plane shortly after takeoff from Tehran, killing all 176 aboard.

April 2021: Iran and the United States begin indirect negotiations in Vienna under President Joe Biden to revive the nuclear agreement.

February 2022: Russia invades Ukraine. Moscow later deploys Iranian drones and missiles in the conflict, deepening Tehran's alignment with the Kremlin.

7 October 2023: Hamas militants attack Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages, triggering the most intense war yet between Israel and Hamas.

19 November 2023: Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels seize a commercial vessel in the Red Sea, launching a sustained campaign against international shipping and drawing in US naval forces.

14 April 2024: Iran launches its first direct attack on Israel, firing more than 300 missiles and drones. Most are intercepted by Israel and a US-led coalition.

1 October 2024: Iran mounts a second direct strike on Israel, again largely thwarted by air defences.

26 October 2024: Israel openly attacks Iranian territory for the first time, striking air defence systems and missile-related sites, signaling a new phase of overt confrontation.

20 January 2025: Donald Trump is inaugurated for a second term as US president.

March–May 2025 After initial public hostility from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the United States and Iran begin a series of direct and indirect talks in Oman and Rome aimed at negotiating a new nuclear framework. Five rounds of negotiations produce limited but inconclusive progress.

9 June 2025: Iran signals it will not accept a US proposal on its nuclear programme.

12 June 2025: The International Atomic Energy Agency declares Iran in noncompliance with its nuclear obligations. Tehran responds by announcing plans to activate a third enrichment facility.

13 June 2025: Israel launches a broad military campaign against Iran, targeting nuclear facilities, military installations and key government sites.

22 June 2025: The United States intervenes, striking three Iranian nuclear sites in a dramatic escalation.

23 June 2025: Iran retaliates by targeting a US-linked military base in Qatar, causing limited damage.

24 June 2025: President Trump announces a ceasefire after 12 days of intense fighting, but tensions remain high.

28 September 2025: After failed diplomatic efforts at the UN Security Council, "snapback" sanctions are formally reimposed on Iran, restoring sweeping international penalties.

8 January 2026: Nationwide demonstrations follow calls from Iran's exiled crown prince. The government responds with internet blackouts and a severe security crackdown that leaves thousands dead and tens of thousands detained.

13 January 2026: Trump cancels planned meetings with Iranian officials, warning that further action may follow.

February 2026: Military tensions spike in the Gulf.

By late February, dipl macy & confrontation proceed in parallel, underscoring the fragile and volatile state of US-Iran ties. —*PTI*

Israeli security conduting an inspection at the destroyed residential area in Israel's Ramat Gan hit bu Iran's missile on 14 January, 2025 — *PTI*

Mexican cartel clashes fuel worries in lead up to FIFA World Cup

Maria Dolores Aguirre's family corner store has lived off tourism that has flowed into her charming cobblestoned town of Tapalpa, tucked away in the mountains of Jalisco state.

That was until gunshots erupted and helicopters flew overhead as the Mexican army killed the country's most powerful drug lord, just a few kilometers from her home.

Now, the 50-year-old Aguirre worries that the bloodshed will deal a blow to her livelihood and change towns like hers. It is something many in the western Mexican state are grappling with, from its Pacific Ocean beaches to its capital Guadalajara that will host matches in June for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"It's going to affect us. It's collateral damage," Aguirre said. "The government is going to have to have a lot of security... The entire world just saw what happened and, of course, people are going to think twice about coming."

Fighting between the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and Mexican security forces raged on in a number of states Monday, fuelling fears among many like Aguirre that there will be more violence to come.

More than 70 people died in the attempt to capture Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes and its aftermath, authorities said Monday. Known as "El Mencho," he was the notorious leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of the fastest-growing criminal networks in Mexico, known for trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine to the US and staging brazen attacks against Mexican government officials.

The White House confirmed that the US provided intelligence support to the operation to capture the cartel leader and applauded Mexico's army for taking down a man who was one of the most wanted criminals in both countries.

The US State Department had offered a reward of up to $15 million for information leading to the arrest of "El Mencho".

The death of Oseguera Cervantes came as Mexico's government has stepped up its offensive against cartels in an effort to meet demands by US President Donald Trump to crack down on criminal groups, threatening to impose more tariffs or take unilateral military action if the country does not show results.

A burned vehicle blocks a road leading to Tapalpa, Mexico, a day after the Mexican army killed Jalisco New Generation Cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, known as El Mencho — *PTI*

Mexico hoped the death of one of the world's biggest fentanyl traffickers would ease that pressure, but many people were anxious as they waited to see the powerful cartel's reaction.

Oseguera Cervantes died after a shootout with the Mexican military on Sunday. Mexican Defence Secretary Gen Ricardo Trevilla said Monday that authorities had tracked one of his romantic partners to his hideout in Tapalpa.

The cartel leader and two bodyguards fled into a wooded area where they were seriously wounded in a firefight. They were taken into custody and died on the way to Mexico City, Trevilla said.

In the aftermath, a sense of unease simmered in tourist towns.

The Pacific Ocean resort city of Puerto Vallarta also was hard hit by cartel reprisals, frightening tourists.

Steve Perkins, 57, was visiting Puerto Vallarta with his wife Gayle and some friends. They were on their hotel room's terrace when explosions and black smoke started appearing around the city Sunday morning.

Their return to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, was delayed when their flight was canceled Monday and they were rebooked for 1 March.

Perkins and his wife have been taking annual trips to Puerto Vallarta since 2012 and have always felt safe, until now. He said they don't plan on returning to Mexico.

"There's a lot of Americans trapped here," Perkins said.

Back in Tapalpa, Aguirre worked next to her son from the small neighbourhood shop her family has owned for 50 years. The 15-year-old's classes were cancelled due to the violence.

Aguirre said it was unclear who exactly was in control of the area surrounding her: the military or the cartel. The other question on her mind was if this was just a one-off, or if there was more violence to come.

"We don't know if these people (cartel leaders) are permanently here or not," she said. "If they really did kill this leader, it could be that they fight between each other to win control or see who will lead it." —*PTI*

4 killed after Iran helicopter crashes into market

TEHRAN, 24 FEB

An Iranian military helicopter crashed into a fruit market in Dorcheh, Iran, killing at least four people, reports state TV. The crash occurred in Isfahan province, 330 kilometres south of Tehran. The helicopter was on a training flight; the pilot and co-pilot died. The semi-official Fars news agency added that two on the ground also died. Footage showed debris and smoke at the scene. Iran has suffered recent crashes, including an F-4 near Hamedan last week, which killed one. Western sanctions have limited aircraft parts, leading Iran to rely on aging helicopters and planes. The country's history of crashes continues amid tensions over its aircraft fleet. *—PTI*

—IMDB

Russell Brand denies sexual assault charges

LONDON, 24 FEB

British comedian and actor Russell Brand, 50, appeared at Southwark Crown Court in London on Tuesday, pleading not guilty to two additional charges of rape and sexual assault dating back nearly two decades. Brand faces accusations of raping one woman and sexually assaulting a second in 2009. Last year, he was charged with two counts of rape, indecent assault, and two sexual assaults against four women between 1999 and 2005. Brand, who said he felt "blessed," arrived wearing a white cowboy hat and sunglasses. Born in 1975 in Essex, he rose to fame as a TV presenter and actor, married Katy Perry in 2010, divorced in 2012, and now appears mainly online. *—AGENCIES*

Dominican Republic reels from 2nd blackout

SANTO DOMINGO, 24 FEB

The Dominican Republic experienced a nationwide blackout on Monday, the second in three months, raising concerns about its power grid's stability. The outage disrupted traffic, public transport, and businesses. The main power plants stopped supplying energy before noon, causing system shutdowns, said the Dominican Electricity Transmission Company. By mid-afternoon, capacity was nearly 30 per cent, explained Energy Minister Joel Santos. "Essential services such as hospitals, water systems, mass transit and airports are operating with backup systems," he said. Santos attributed the failure to a trip in a transmission line switch. Last November's blackout was blamed on human error during maintenance. *—PTI*

—X

Reiner's son pleads not guilty to parents' murder

LOS ANGELES, 24 FEB

Nick Reiner, son of Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner, pleaded not guilty on Monday to two counts of first-degree murder, denying he fatally stabbed his parents. His lawyer, Kimberly Greene, entered the plea in Los Angeles, where Reiner, 32, stood behind glass in custody. Held without bail since December, Reiner appeared with a shaved head, in brown jail clothes, speaking briefly with his lawyer before the hearing. He waived his right to a speedy trial, with a preliminary hearing scheduled for 29 April. District Attorney Hochman said the office is still deciding on seeking the death penalty. The case has attracted intense media attention, with motives still unknown and details kept under wraps. *—PTI*

'Putin couldn't break Ukraine after 4yrs'

Putin has not achieved his goals, says Zelenskyy; asks Trump to visit war-torn country

KYIV, 24 FEB

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia has not "broken Ukrainians" nor triumphed in its war as it marks four years since the all-out invasion began.

In a show of support, more than a dozen senior European officials headed to the Ukrainian capital to mark the grim anniversary of the conflict, which has killed tens of thousands of people, upended life for millions of Ukrainians, and created instability far beyond its borders.

Zelenskyy said his country has withstood the onslaught by Russia's bigger and better equipped army, which over the past year of fighting captured just 0.79 per cent of Ukraine's territory, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank. Russia now holds nearly 20 per cent of Ukraine.

It would cost USD 588 billion over a decade to rebuild Ukraine, three times Kyiv's nominal GDP *—UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE*

"Looking back at the beginning of the invasion and reflecting on today, we have every right to say: We have defended our independence, we have not lost our statehood," Zelenskyy said on social media.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has "not achieved his goals", Zelenskyy added. "He has not broken Ukrainians; he has not won this war."

At a makeshift memorial in Kyiv's central square, where thousands of small flags and portraits show photos of fallen soldiers, Zelenskyy said he would like US President Donald Trump to visit Ukraine. "Only then can one truly understand what this war is really about."

Trump, who once vowed to end the war in a day, appears to have run out of interest as the US-led peace efforts have remained stuck on territorial concessions and security guarantees. Trump has repeatedly belittled Zelenskyy and been seen as pro-Putin. *—PTI*

RUSSIA OCCUPIES 20%OF UKRAINE

Nearly 2 million	1.2 million	70,172
military personnel have been killed in the war	Russian death toll	Ukrainian deaths

SOURCE: ISW, OHCHR

Surveillance of Mexico's El Mencho's girlfriend led to his capture

MEXICO CITY, 24 FEB

US and Mexican surveillance of a Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes' girlfriend led to his capture, Mexican authorities said on Monday. Oseguera Cervantes, known as 'El Mencho', was the leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, was captured and killed on Sunday.

El Mencho was taken into custody on Sunday after a shootout that killed eight people. He, along with his two bodyguards died en transit, prompting unrest in Mexico, where at least 70 people were killed.

Mexico and the US had spent years tracking El Mencho, one of the biggest and most wanted cartel leaders, but had little success in tracking him.

Mexican Defence Secretary Gen Ricardo Trevilla said that the US and Mexican intelligence authorities began following an associate of one of El Mencho's girlfriends. The associate was seen accompanying the girlfriend to Tapalpa, Jalisco, on Friday for a meeting with the drug lord.

The exact location was confirmed by "very important additional information" provided by US intelligence. Once the woman left after spending the night with El Mencho, special forces finalised their plans, and launched the operation.

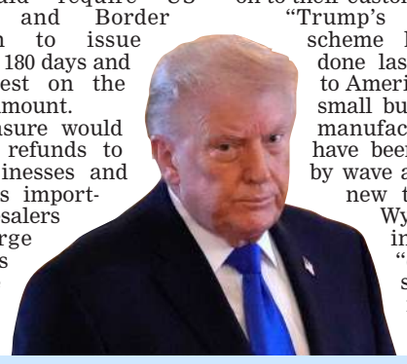
Trevilla said "El Tuli" — Oseguera's right-hand man — was the mastermind of the violence that followed – which killed at least 25 National Guards, 30 cartel members and dozens of civilians. *—PTI*

Don must return billions in tariffs: Dems

WASHINGTON, 24 FEB

A trio of Senate Democrats is calling for the government to start refunding roughly USD 175 billion in tariff revenues that the Supreme Court ruled were collected because of an illegal set of orders by President Trump.

Senators Ron Wyden of Oregon, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire are unveiling a bill on Monday that would require US Customs and Border Protection to issue refunds in 180 days and pay interest on the refunded amount.



The measure would prioritise refunds to small businesses and encourages importers, wholesalers and large companies to pass the refunds on to their customers.

"Trump's illegal tax scheme has already done lasting damage to American families, small businesses and manufacturers who have been hammered by wave after wave of new tariffs," said Wyden, stressing that the "crucial first step" to fixing the problem begins with "putting money back in the pockets."

The bill is unlikely to become law, but it reveals how Democrats are starting to apply public pressure on a Trump administration that has shown little interest in trying to return tariff revenues after the Supreme Court announced its 6-3 ruling on Friday. Meanwhile, FedEx said it was suing the government, seeking returns in the tariff money. *—PTI*

TRUMP REFUTES REPORTS THAT GENERAL CAUTIONED AGAINST IRAN WAR

WASHINGTON, 24 FEB

US President Donald Trump refuted reports that said General Daniel Caine cautioned Washington against attacking Iran.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said that the stories are "100 per cent incorrect". He added that Caine, like him, "would not like to see War" but is confident that it can be "easily won".

Media reports claimed that Caine told Trump that a military campaign on Iran could entangle the US in a prolonged conflict, something that Tehran and Gulf nations have repeatedly said would be the case.

"He has not spoken of not doing Iran, or even the fake limited strikes that I have been reading about, he only knows one thing, how to WIN and, if he is told to do so, he will be leading the pack. Everything that has been written about a potential War with Iran has been written incorrectly, and purposefully so," he added.

Amid the background of a major buildup of US military equipment in the region, Trump urged Iran to agree to terms with Washington on the nuclear deal.

"It will be a very bad day for that Country and, very sadly, its people," if they don't make a deal, he wrote. "I am the one that makes the decision".

Meanwhile, student protests continued in Iran into the fourth day, the first protests since the major uprising in December and January that ended with thousand dead. *—Agencies*

Nepal poll results to be out within 24 hours of voting

KATHMANDU, 24 FEB

Nepal's Acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari on Monday said the results of the general elections scheduled for 5 March will be published within 24 hours of collecting the ballot boxes.

A total of 18.9 million eligible voters will exercise their franchise to elect 275 members of the House of Representatives (HoR).

While 165 lawmakers will be elected through direct voting, 110 will be elected under the proportional voting system that allows for the representation of minorities and smaller parties in the parliament.

The Election Commission plans to begin vote counting immediately after the ballot boxes are collected, Bhandari said.

He said while it may take one or two days to declare the results under the proportional representation system, the outcomes of the direct voting or first-past-the-post (FPTP) system will be announced within 24 hours of ballot collection.

Voters cast a separate ballot for a party, and seats are allocated in proportion to each party's share of votes. Parties must ensure inclusion of women and marginalised groups such as dalits, janajatis, madhesis and minorities in their PR candidate lists.

This system aims to make parliament more representative of Nepal's social and ethnic diversity.

Polling will be held from 7am to 5pm on 5 March. *—PTI*

Imran Khan treated for eye ailment, returned to jail

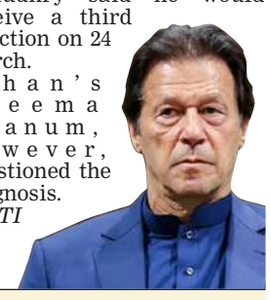
ISLAMABAD, 24 FEB

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan was taken early on Tuesday from Adiala jail to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad for treatment of a right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) and later shifted back, officials said.

He received a second dose of anti-VEGF intravitreal injection, having earlier been treated on 24 January. "Prior to the procedure, he was examined by a board of specialists… (result: normal)," a doctor said, adding that "after obtaining informed consent… he was injected with a second dose" by specialists from PIMS and Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital. The day-care procedure was completed with stable vitals and he was discharged with follow-up advice.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said he would receive a third injection on 24 March.

Khan's Aleema Khanum, however, questioned the diagnosis. *—PTI*



China adds Japanese firms to export controls amid rising tensions

BEIJING, 24 FEB

China has placed 20 Japanese companies on an export control list and a further 20 on a watchlist, amid ongoing tensions over comments by Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own. Chinese exporters will be banned from selling dual-use goods, applicable for civilian and military purposes, to the 20 companies, according to China's Commerce Ministry.

Targeted firms include subsidiaries of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries involved in shipbuilding and aircraft engines, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, and Fujitsu. Foreign entities are also prohibited from providing dual-use items from China to these firms.

Tensions have escalated between Chinese President Xi Jinpig and Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi over Taiwan*—X/FREEPIK*

The other list requires companies to submit export licences with risk assessments and pledges that items won't be used militarily. The measures aim to curb Japan's remilitarisation and nuclear ambitions.

The move follows Takaichi's earlier remarks suggesting Japan could intervene militarily if China attacks Taiwan, .

This comes ahead of German Chancelor Friedrich Merz' visit to China on Wednesday, where he will look to expand bilateral relations. *—PTI*

FRANCE-US TENSIONS ESCALATE AS JARED KUSHNER'S DAD SKIPS SUMMON

PARIS, 24 FEB

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot slammed US Ambassador to Paris Charles Kushner, saying French Minister won't meet with him.

Charles has not been responding to summons and won't have access to French government officials until he complies, the Foreign Minister said.

Notably, Charles is the father of US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, who has been the centre of negotiations involving Gaza, Iran and Ukraine, to name a few.

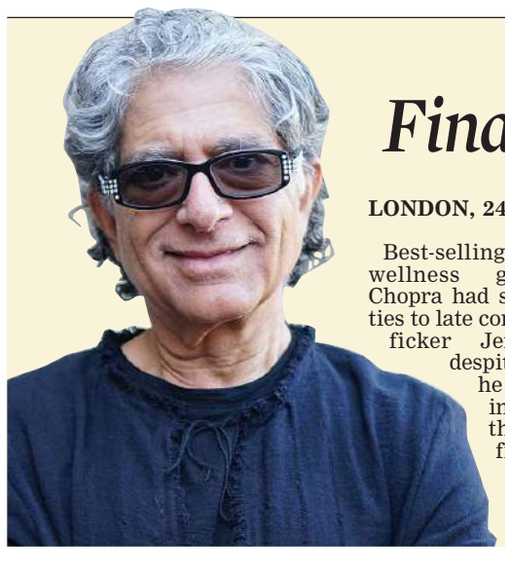
Charles failed to show up for a meeting on Monday over comments from the Trump administration that France objected to, France's Foreign Ministry said.

Barrot said that Charles "is bringing difficulties on himself. Because for an ambassador to be able to do his job, he needs access to members of the government. That's the basics."

"There is nothing more usual than summoning an ambassador when explanations need to be made," he said. "When these explanations have taken place, then the US ambassador will regain access to members of the government."

Members of the Trump administration had been posting on X about the death of Far-Right activist Quentin Deranque, who was allegedly beaten to death in a fight. *—PTI*

DIVINE REVELATIONS



Finances, healing & girls: Deepak and Epstein's bonhomie

LONDON, 24 FEB

Best-selling author and wellness guru Deepak Chopra had strong financial ties to late convicted sex trafficker Jefrey Epstein, despite claiming that he had limited interactions with the disgraced financier.

In 2017, the Chopra Foundation received a $50,000 donation from Gratitude America, one of Epstein's foundations, according to the latest files released by the US Justice Department. This was meant to support scientific research. The two frequently exchanged texts about science, medicine and quantum healing.

Chopra and Poonacha Machaiah, co-founder of the wellness app Jiyo, sought Epstein's advice and connections for the venture.

Chopra and Epstein also frequently discussed "girls".

"Universe is human construct. … Cute girls are aware when they make noises," Chopra wrote to Epstein in 2017.

Epstein responded: "So when the girl says oh my god?"

Chopra replied, "Yes That's divine tran=cendence. (sic)"

The emails also revealed a close friendship between the duo, where Epstein sent him sweatshirts. Epstein's alleged last partner and heiress Karyna Shuliak mailed Epstein: "Reminder: sweatshirts for Deepak. I need the initials and the size please" to which Chopra later replied with a "thank you" and joked that Epstein could think about jewellery for next time.

The two also discussed a 'Satsang with Deepak Chopra', the details of which are unavailable.

EUROPE CRASHES FROM FALLOUT

Former Norwegian PM Thorbjorn Jagland reportedly attempted suicide after his ties to Epstein emerged. Jagland, who served in the Nobel Committee, was charged with misconduct and faces up to 10 years of jail.

UK politician Peter Mandelson has been released on bail after being arrested for leaking information to Epstein. *—Salar News*

— FREEPIK

Gold rises by Rs 1.6L/10g; Silver stays unchanged

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Gold prices rose by Rs 400 to Rs 1,63,200 per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday amid persistent buying by stockists and a weaker rupee, according to the local marketmen. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,62,800 per 10g on Monday. However, silver prices remained unchanged at Rs 2,72,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). Traders said increased offtake by local jewellers and stockists supported gold prices in the domestic market, even as international precious metal rates declined. In the international markets, spot gold was trading 1.35 per cent lower at USD 5,157.16 per ounce, while silver traded flat at USD 88.19 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee declines 6P to settle at 90.95 against USD

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

The rupee traded in a narrow range on Tuesday and settled 6 paise lower at 90.95 (provisional) against the US dollar amid a firm greenback and higher crude oil prices. A sharp fall in domestic equity markets and uncertainties over the India-US trade deal further pressured the local unit, while foreign fund inflows lent some support, forex traders said. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.91 and traded in a narrow range of 90.91-90.97 due to possible intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It ended the session at 90.95 (provisional), down 6 paise from its previous close. The rupee gained 5 paise to settle at 90.89 against the US dollar on Monday. *—PTI*

CleanMax commits Rs 1,200 cr to Andhra solar plan

AMARAVATI, 24 FEB

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has approved a 200 MW solar power park to be developed by Yashaswa Power LLP, a group firm of Clean Max Enviro Energy Solutions Private Ltd, which is launching a Rs 3,100-crore mainboard IPO. The Rs 1,200-crore project will set up a 200 MW AC/300 MWp DC solar park in Sri Sathya Sai district, expected to generate 445 million units of clean power annually and create around 690 jobs. Spread over 1,200 acres, it will connect to the APTRANSCO Hindupur substation for grid stability. CleanMax operates 2.5 GW of renewable assets. Its IPO will list on the BSE and the NSE of India. *—PTI*

केनरा बैंक
Canara Bank

— WIKIPEDIA

Canara Bank to raise Rs 5,000 cr via bonds

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

State-owned Canara Bank on Tuesday said it plans to tap the Tier 2 bond market with the launch of a Rs 5,000 crore issue to strengthen its capital base and support future growth plans. The issue is scheduled for February 26 on the Electronic Bidding Platform of the National Stock Exchange, Canara Bank said in a statement. Canara Bank is set to raise up to Rs 5,000 crore through Basel III-compliant Tier 2 bonds, it said. The proposed raise comprises a base issue of Rs 2,000 crore with a green shoe option of up to Rs 3,000 crore, enabling the bank to respond flexibly to robust investor appetite, it said. *—PTI*

Mkts tumble over 1% on IT stocks selloff, Trump tariff worries

Sensex plummets by 1,068.74 points, while Nifty fell by 288.35 points

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled more than 1 per cent on Tuesday, dragged down by heavy losses in IT stocks amid concerns over artificial intelligence-led disruption and renewed trade-related uncertainties.

Rising global crude prices amid escalating US-Iran tensions and sluggish global cues also hit investor sentiment, traders said.

Snapping its two-session rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,068.74 points, or 1.28 per cent, to settle at 82,225.92. During the day, the benchmark plunged 1,359.93 points, or 1.63 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 81,934.73.

A total of 2,802 stocks declined, while 1,422 advanced and 143 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rising global crude prices amid escalating US-Iran tensions and sluggish global cues also hit investor sentiment PHOTO: PTI

The 50-share NSE Nifty fell 288.35 points, or 1.12 per cent, to close at 25,424.65. In the intraday session, it depreciated by 385.4 points, or 1.49 per cent, to hit a low of 25,327.60.

As many as 32 of its components ended in the red while 18 settled in the green territory.

Tech Mahindra emerged as the biggest laggard, declining by 6.6 per cent, followed by HCL Technologies, Eternal, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Larsen & Toubro, Trent, Bharti Airtel, HDFC Bank, Bharat Electronics Ltd and ICICI Bank.

On the other hand, NTPC, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel, PowerGrid, Titan, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, and Sun Pharmaceuticals were among the gainers.

Broader indices also ended in the negative territory, with the BSE Smallcap Select Index falling 0.68 per cent, while the Midcap Select Index slipped 0.54 per cent. *—PTI*

HOW MARKETS PERFORMED

Nikkei Japan	57,321.09	(0.9%) ↑
DOW US	48,804.06	(1.66%) ↓
Nasdaq US	22,627.27	(1.1%) ↓
S&P 500 US	6,837.75	(1.04%) ↓
Hang Seng CHN	26,590.32	(0.9%) ↓
DAX GERMANY	24,952.11	(0.2%) ↓
FTSE 100 UK	10,673.99	(0.1%) ↓
CAC 40 PARIS	8,491.94	(0.1%) ↓

15% tariff to benefit some Asia-pacific nations: Moody's

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

A uniform 15 per cent tariff, announced by US President Donald Trump, would benefit some Asia-Pacific economies that have faced much steeper country-specific levies, including China and much of Southeast Asia, Moody's Analytics said on Tuesday.

But it will have a small impact on countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (China), it said in a statement.

"There is a lot of uncertainty, but we do know a few things. A uniform 15 per cent tariff would benefit some Asia-Pacific economies that have faced much steeper country-specific levies," it said.

The US Supreme Court last week ruled against the Trump administration's country-specific tariffs after which Trump announced to increase tariff on all countries to 15 per cent. No order or proclamation has been issued so far in this regard. *—PTI*

IDFC First Bank's ₹556 cr fraud money recovered: H'yana CM

CHANDIGARH, 24 FEB

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday informed the State Assembly that the state government had recovered nearly Rs 556 crore owed to it in the IDFC First Bank case.

"Nearly Rs 556 crore, including nearly Rs 22 crore in interest, came back within 24 hours," Saini said in the House.

On Sunday, the bank disclosed a Rs 590-crore fraud committed by its employees and others in accounts held by the Haryana government.

"I want to clarify before the House that the money concerning Haryana government departments, (the) entire amount has been deposited back into our accounts...The recovery has been made within 24 hours," Saini said.

He said the bank had apprised the government that the incident involved four to five employees of a particular branch of the bank in Chandigarh, who colluded in the whole thing. He said anybody who is involved – be it a bank employee, private individual or even a government employee -- will not be spared.

On Monday, Saini said the state's Anti-Corruption Bureau would conduct an in-depth probe into the fraud. "We have formed a committee headed by the Finance Secretary in this entire matter," Saini said on Monday.

Taking a dig at Congress, Saini said during the party's time, scams used to be hushed up and no one used to be held accountable, whereas the BJP government is working with zero tolerance towards corruption.

Meanwhile, the shares of the bank rose to Rs 70.75 apiece, at 1.01 per cent on Tuesday. *–PTI*

- On Sunday, the bank disclosed a Rs 590-crore fraud committed by its employees and others in accounts held by the Haryana government.

Anil Ambani case: HC lifts stay on 3 banks' actions

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

The Bombay High Court has lifted the stay on three banks' actions to classify **Anil Ambani**'s accounts as fraud, asserting that violations of RBI fraud rules are not subject to judicial scrutiny.

The bench, comprising Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad, overturned a December 2025 single bench order that had paused the proceedings based on the RBI Master Directions.

The court allowed appeals from the banks and BDO India LLP, calling the earlier order "perverse and illegal" with "procedural irregularity." It emphasised that RBI's Master Directions aim to protect public money and facilitate early fraud detection, and cannot be misinterpreted to cause prejudice to lenders.

The judgment stated that "no irreparable injury" would be caused to Ambani if proceedings continued, citing ongoing criminal investigations. It criticised the single bench for "contradictory findings," based on "flawed assumptions of fact and law," and misunderstood the primary purpose of the RBI directions.

The court highlighted that banks are entitled to employ external forensic auditors, such as BDO LLP, which is empanelled by the Indian Banks Association and SEBI. The Master Directions do not mandate a forensic report before final decisions, and the court found the single judge's conclusion that BDO LLP's report was not forensic "perverse and liable to be set aside."

Ambani's plea for a stay to approach the Supreme Court was declined. *—PTI*

Bitcoin falls sharply by 19%, faces worst decline since 2022

LONDON, 24 FEB

Bitcoin continued its decline on Tuesday, marking its sharpest monthly fall since the 2022 crypto industry turmoil.

The world's largest cryptocurrency dropped up to 2.64 per cent to $62,858 during Asian trading hours, now down over 19 per cent in February, its worst monthly performance since June 2022.

The decline leaves Bitcoin roughly 50 per cent below its October record high of $126,272. It is also heading for its fifth consecutive monthly loss, the longest streak since 2018.

Other cryptos such as Ethereum fell below $1900, with XRP at $1.34, BNB at $598.73, Solana at $77.7, and Dogecoin at $0.092. The weakness was driven by increased uncertainty around US trade policy after the Supreme Court struck down tariffs imposed by Donald Trump.

He announced new tariffs of 15 per cent, with only a 10 per cent levy taking effect. Despite legal hurdles, he remains committed to his trade agenda. Riya Sehgal from Delta Exchange said that broader market stability depends on easing macro headwinds and a rebound in capital flows. *—Agencies*

Rare minerals pact with 2 nations may be approve

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Cabinet is set to approve a Joint Declaration of Intent with Germany for cooperation in the critical minerals sector, and is also expected to endorse a similar agreement with Canada, sources said. The decisions, likely to be taken at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aim to strengthen India's strategic partnerships amid a global scramble for resources vital to clean energy and advanced technologies.

The pact with Germany will focus on joint exploration, sustainable mining, supply chain resilience, and technology transfer. This comes as India intensifies efforts to secure critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements through international alliances.

The Cabinet is also expected to approve the signing of the Joint Declaration of Intent with Canada for cooperation in the critical minerals sector. These moves align with the government's Critical Minerals Mission launched last year and recent mineral block auctions under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act. *—PTI*

Agri, processed food items exempt from RoDTEP cuts: Govt

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The government on Tuesday clarified that the reduced rates and value caps under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme will not apply to agricultural and processed food exports. The clarification follows Monday's decision to halve duty benefits with immediate effect, which had triggered concern among exporters.

In a notification, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade stated that the revised rates notified on 23 February, 2026 will not cover products classified under ITC HS Chapters 01–24, which include agricultural and processed food items.

Introduced in 2021, the scheme refunds taxes, duties and levies incurred in manufacturing and distribution that are not reimbursed through other mechanisms. Refund rates range between 0.3 per cent and 3.9 per cent, and the scheme is valid until March.

Exporters expressed disappointment over the sudden 50 per cent reduction, warning it would hurt thin-margin sectors such as leather and engineering goods.

India's exports edged up 0.61 per cent to $36.56 billion in January, while the trade deficit widened to $34.68 billion. *—PTI*

AI shift will be painful for IT sector: HCLTech CEO

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Amid growing concerns about jobs and the future of India's nearly USD 300 billion IT services industry, **C Vijayakumar**, Managing Director and Chief Executive of HCL Technologies, said the AI-driven transition would be "painful" as it directly affects people.

Speaking at an event hosted by Nasscom, he stressed it was premature to "write an obituary" for the sector. He described the shift as the biggest inflection point for Indian IT, offering an opportunity to reinvent itself over the next decade.

While acknowledging global job cuts as AI automates tasks, he noted that only around 30 per cent of software development involves coding, despite rapid advances by firms. He emphasised the need for large-scale reskilling, saying employees could deliver up to four time's greater efficiency using AI tools. He also cautioned that SaaS firms and hyperscalers investing heavily in infrastructure may face revenue pressures. *—PTI*

CHINESE AI THREATS FLAGGED

WH pressures Claude AI for military use

WASHINGTON, 24 FEB

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei are set to meet on Tuesday for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in national defence, said sources.

According to sources, a defence official allegedly confirmed the meeting between Hegseth and Amodei but was unaware of the details regarding their meeting.

"Anthropic knows this is not a get-to-know-you meeting. This is not a friendly meeting. This is a sh*t-or-get-off-the-pot meeting," said a senior official from the US Department of Defence.

According to sources, the was held to use Anthropic's AI model, Claude, which is the only model available in the military's classified systems.

Claude is the only AI model used for sensitive and intelligence work done in defence.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth; Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei—WIKIPEDIA

Meanwhile, Anthropic claims that it has identified "industrial-scale distillation attacks" on its own reasoning AI models made by Chinese firms DeepSeek, Moonshot AI and MiniMax.

In a post on X, Anthropic shared, "These labs created over 24,000 fraudulent accounts and generated over 16 million exchanges with Claude, extracting its capabilities to train and improve their own models." "Distillation can be legitimate: AI labs use it to create smaller, cheaper models for their customers. But foreign labs that illicitly distil American models can remove safeguards, feeding model capabilities into their own military, intelligence, and surveillance systems," it wrote further.

- According to sources, the was held to use Anthropic's AI model, Claude, which is the only model available in the military's classified systems.

Anthropic is an artificial intelligence research company founded in 2021 by former OpenAI resear *—Agencies*

Deepinder Goyal's Aerospace buys defence robotics startup

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

LAT Aerospace, founded by **Deepinder Goyal** and former COO Surobhi Das, has acquired Gurugram-based defence robotics start-up Sharang Shakti to build shared technology for sensing, navigation and control systems.

In a post on X on Tuesday, Goyal said the intent is to build in-house capabilities and deploy them across both defence and civil programmes over time.

Goyal resigned as Managing Director and Group CEO of Eternal — parent entity of Zomato and Blinkit — last month to pursue what he termed "new ideas that involve significantly higher-risk exploration and experimentation". "LAT Aerospace has acquired Sharang Shakti, an early-stage defence robotics startup based in Gurgaon. This is our first move toward building indigenous defence capabilities alongside our long-term mission of developing next-generation civil aviation platforms from India," Goyal wrote on X.

"By bringing Sharang Shakti into LAT, we are building these capabilities in-house, from first principles, with the intent to deploy them across both defence and civil programs over time. Slowly but surely," he concluded. Founded in 2025, LAT Aerospace is developing a new generation of Short Take-Off and Landing aircraft engineered to operate from compact air-stops rather than conventional airports. *—PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Torino fires Baroni, appoints D'Aversa as coach

TURIN, 24 FEB

Torino has fired Marco Baroni and immediately named Roberto D'Aversa as the new coach of the Serie A club. Baroni was axed after Torino lost at Genoa 3-0 on Sunday, a fourth straight winless match in all competitions. Torino played the entire second half with 10 men. Torino sits 15th in the table, just three points clear of the drop zone. The 50-year-old D'Aversa, an Italian who was born in Stuttgart, Germany, signed a contract to June 30, Torino said in a statement. The former Serie A midfielder was previously in charge of Italian sides Empoli, Lecce, Sampdoria, Parma and Virtus Lanciano. —*PTI*

Aus to tour SA for 3 test matches and 3 ODIs in Sept

MELBOURNE, 24 FEB

Australia will play three test matches preceded by three one-day cricket internationals in South Africa in September and October. The tests will be the first between the countries since South Africa won the World Test Championship over Australia at Lord's last June. It was the Proteas' first major cricket trophy in 37 years. Cricket Australia said Tuesday that the one-day matches will be played on 24 September in Durban, 27 September at Johannesburg and a day-night match at Potchefstroom on 30 September. After a two-day warmup match at Potchefstroom on Oct. 3-4, the first test begins Oct. 9 at Durban. The series will continue with tests beginning Oct. 18 at Gqeberha — formerly Port Elizabeth — and the final match from Oct. 27-31 at Newlands in Cape Town. —*PTI*

Day 1 Ranji final: J&K dominates K'taka

Shubham Pundir's century and a 88 from Hassan power J&K to 284 for two at stumps

HUBBALLI, 24 FEB

Shubham Pundir's unbeaten century and a resilient 88 from young Yawer Hassan powered Jammu & Kashmir to 284 for two at stumps on the opening day of the Ranji Trophy final against Karnataka here on Tuesday.

The 27-year-old left-handed Pundir was 117 not out, while Abdul Samad supported him with 52, adding 105 for the third wicket after captain Paras Dogra retired hurt. Earlier, Pundir and Yawer had shared a 139-run second-wicket stand that laid the foundation for a commanding total against the eight-time champions.

Pundir reached his hundred in style, dispatching Shikhar Shetty over deep mid-wicket and celebrated by raising his arms to the dressing room.

Karnataka's Prasidh Krishna celebrates with teammates after taking wicket of Jammu and Kashmir's Yawer Hassan at KSCA Cricket Stadium, in Hubballi, Karnataka —*PTI*

Winning the toss, Dogra's decision to bat first on a pitch expected to deteriorate proved astute.

- Pundir reached his 100 in style, dispatching Shikhar over mid-wicket.

J&K, playing their maiden Ranji final after impressive knockout wins over Madhya Pradesh and Bengal, lost Qamran Iqbal early for six. The opener edged a Prasidh Krishna delivery to KL Rahul at slip. At lunch, Yawer was 57 not out and Pundir on 38, having expertly negotiated the challenging opening spell.

The Karnataka attack, including pacers and leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal—season's leading wicket-taker with 55 scalps—bowled with discipline but found no reward. Both Yawer and Pundir kept the scoreboard ticking at around three runs an over, showing composure against the new ball.

Yawer, 22, who debuted in former India captain Rohit Sharma's last red-ball game in 2025 and had gone nine matches without a fifty, hit 13 boundaries before falling to Prasidh for 88, edging outside off to Rahul at first slip.

Dogra also faced trouble from Prasidh's short-pitched deliveries. He took several blows, requiring physio attention, and eventually retired hurt on the coach's signal, allowing Samad to join Pundir. The duo batted with authority, consolidating J&K's position with an unbroken 105-run partnership, leaving Karnataka's bowlers searching for answers as the final day draws near. —*PTI*

Prague Chess Festival: Gukesh eyes his first success of the year

PRAGUE, 24 FEB

World champion D. Gukesh will look to rediscover form when he leads India's challenge at the Prague International Chess Festival starting Wednesday, following an early World Cup exit and a modest outing at the Tata Steel Masters.

Seeded second in a strong, youthful field, Gukesh faces a stern test from top seed Vincent Keymer and Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov, both in better recent form. Keymer is fourth in the live ratings, just ahead of Abdusattorov, while Gukesh, ranked 10th, is India's highest-rated player.

With Arjun Erigaisi and R Praggnanandhaa slipping out of the top 10, Gukesh has become India's new No 1.

Defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram joins him in the Masters section, seeking a return to the 2700 club after a dip in form.

- With Arjun Erigaisi and R Praggnanandhaa slipping out of the top 10, Gukesh has become India's new No 1.

Abdusattorov, fresh from his Tata Steel triumph, starts as favourite, while Hans Niemann, Parham Maghsoodloo and Jorden van Foreest add depth. Nodirbek Yakubboev, David Anton Guijarro and local star David Navara complete the 10-player line-up.

In the Challengers, Surya Shekhar Ganguly and Women's World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh spearhead India's campaign, with Benjamin Gledura top seed ahead of Jonas Buhl Bjerre. —*PTI*

Zimbabwe warns of India's firepower ahead of S8 clash

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Zimbabwe head coach Justin Sammons is expecting India to come out all guns blazing in their Super Eight clash of the T20 World Cup on Thursday but he believes his underdog team would be ready after the hard lessons learnt from a heavy loss to the West Indies here.

Zimbabwe were thrashed by 107 runs by the Caribbean outfit, which posted the second highest total of the tournament history, 254/6, in their Super Eight match here on Monday.

Sammons is quite sure that India too will come hard at them in Chennai after being handed an 83-run defeat by South Africa.

"We know the way India is going to come out and it's going to be very similar to the way West Indies approached their innings. They're (India) not going to hold back," Sammons said after the match.

"There will be good learnings from that and how we deal with that, under pressure in the moment, how do we stay calm and just think on our feet and also just try and change things up a little bit, disrupt the rhythm of the batters," he added.

Acknowledging the mistakes made during the West Indies game, Sammons said his side, especially the bowling unit, was guilty of being "predictable". —*PTI*

B'desh joins India in Group 1 as ICC announces Women's T20 WC

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The International Cricket Council has unveiled the full schedule for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026, with hosts England women's national cricket team facing Sri Lanka women's national cricket team in the opener on 12 June.

The 10th edition, running from 12 June to 5 July, will feature 12 teams — the largest field in the tournament's history.

Bangladesh women's national cricket team, Ireland women's national cricket team, Scotland women's national cricket team and Netherlands women's national cricket team sealed qualification via the global qualifier in Nepal.

They join defending champions New Zealand women's national cricket team, inaugural winners England, 2016 champions West Indies women's national cricket team, ODI world champions India women's national cricket team and six-time winners Australia women's national cricket team.

Ireland and Scotland meet at Old Trafford on 13 June, while England face Scotland at Headingley on 20 June — their first ICC clash on English soil. Group A comprises Australia, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Bangladesh and the Netherlands, who make their debut.

Group B includes West Indies, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Ireland and Scotland. The final will be held at Lord's Cricket Ground on 5 July. —*ANI*

TODAY'S MATCH

Lanka seek course correction in do or die against Kiwis

COLOMBO, 24 FEB

Sri Lanka national cricket team must fix their struggles against slower bowlers when they face New Zealand national cricket team in a must-win Super Eight clash of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka failed to chase 147 against England in Pallekele, with poor shot selection criticised on sluggish surfaces. Batting coach Vikram Rathour admitted better options were available. Pathum Nissanka has led the batting, while Dunith Wellalage has impressed with the ball.

New Zealand, led by Mitchell Santner, shared points with Pakistan after a washout. Finn Allen and Tim Seifert are in form. The match starts at 7pm. —*PTI*

Aus outplay India in opening Women's ODI

BRISBANE, 24 FEB

Australia women's national cricket team outclassed reigning world champions India women's national cricket team by six wickets in the opening Women's ODI at Allan Border Field on Tuesday.

India were bowled out for 214 despite half-centuries from Smriti Mandhana (58 off 68) and captain Harmanpreet Kaur (53 off 84). Ashleigh Gardner starred with 3 for 33.

Australia chased comfortably, powered by skipper Alyssa Healy (50 off 70), in her farewell series, and Beth Mooney (76 off 79). The multi-format series is level at 2-2 after India won the preceding T20 leg 2-1. A one-off Test in Perth will conclude Healy's career.

India's only bowling highlight was left-arm spinner Shree Charani removing Phoebe Litchfield and Georgia Voll in successive deliveries.

Opting to bat, India lost Pratika Rawal early to Megan Schutt on her comeback from injury, while Shafali Verma fell cheaply. Gardner dismissed Jemimah Rodrigues and later Harmanpreet, both attempting sweeps. Kashvee Gautam's brisk 43, featuring three sixes, lifted India past 200.

Mandhana admitted the batting unit must regroup but insisted one defeat would not trigger major changes. —*PTI*

Govt asks IOA to constitute ad-hoc panel for karate

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Sports Ministry has directed the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to constitute an ad-hoc committee to manage karate in India, citing governance chaos caused by multiple bodies claiming to be the sport's national federation.

In a letter to IOA president PT Usha, the ministry said urgent steps were needed with karate featuring in this year's Asian Games, where 56 medals are on offer. It warned that athlete preparation for the Games and other international events would "suffer irreparably" without an interim governance mechanism.

The ad-hoc panel will select athletes for international competitions until a recognised federation is in place.

At present, the All-India Karate-Do Federation, Karate Association of India, Karate India Organisation, Karate India and The Karate Federation of India all claim authority, leading to litigation and confusion.

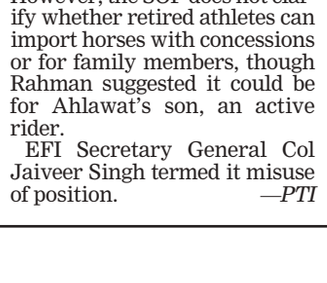
The ministry said factional disputes have created an administrative vacuum, hampering training. Last year, the Sports Authority of India funded a 45-day camp in Lucknow for 48 karatekas under the TAGG scheme at a cost of Rs 1.42 crore. —*PTI*

No free pass as India women eye revival in hockey

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Past laurels will count for little as the Indian women's hockey team enters a potentially make-or-break year, with new head coach Sjoerd Marijne insisting that every player must fight for her place.

India is enduring a difficult phase. After finishing a historic fourth at the Tokyo Olympics under Marijne, the side failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, missed out on the FIH Pro League and could not secure a World Cup berth via the Asia Cup route.



Marijne, who stepped down after Tokyo for personal reasons, returned earlier this year following Harendra Singh's removal.

The team will attempt to revive its fortunes at the World Cup qualifiers in Hyderabad from March 8–14.

Marijne has inducted six junior players after closely tracking performances in the Hockey India League. "Seniors understand that past achievements don't count. Everyone has to fight for the spot. It's normal in team sport," he said. He cautioned that progress will be gradual, though fitness levels are improving under returning strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard. "There were many small injuries. We must take an individual approach and manage workload carefully to restore freshness."

With India currently ranked ninth, Marijne acknowledged the long road to the Los Angeles Olympics.

Alongside fitness, he is prioritising mental conditioning and team bonding, saying unity needs improvement based on feedback received. Beyond the qualifiers, India are targeting Pro League qualification through the Nations Cup and an Asian Games medal later this year. —*PTI*

Bucknor regrets giving Tendulkar out 22 years ago

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

More than two decades after a controversial decision that stunned Indian cricket, former elite umpire Steve Bucknor has admitted he erred in giving Sachin Tendulkar out leg-before wicket at Brisbane.

Bucknor, who retired in 2009 after a distinguished career, described the call as the toughest of his life in an interview with the West Indies Cricket Umpires' Association. "Every day people talk about it. But in life, mistakes happen. I have accepted that it was a mistake, and life goes on."

The incident occurred during the 2003-04 Test at the The Gabba. Batting on three, Tendulkar attempted to leave a delivery from Australian pacer Jason Gillespie but was struck high on the pads.

Bucknor upheld a loud appeal, though replays later showed the ball sailing over the stumps. —*PTI*

EFI UNDER LENS OVER DUTY EXEMPTION ON HORSE IMPORT BY RETIRED PLAYER

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The functioning of the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) has come under scrutiny after it facilitated customs duty exemption for Arjuna awardee Major General Deep Ahlawat to import a competition horse despite his status as a pension-drawing retired athlete.

Under the Arjuna Award pension scheme, recipients must declare they have retired from active sport. Ahlawat, a former rider, is currently availing the pension.

Documents show that on 26 June, EFI wrote to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade seeking an import licence with duty concessions for six horses from several European nations, citing the sport's development. On 9 September, 2025, it again approached the Sports Ministry seeking a Customs Duty Exemption Certificate (CDEC) for Ahlawat to import

two horses, including a warmblood named Lovely Miss Moneypenny, with exemption for one.

EFI Joint Secretary Lt Col MM Rahman said the move followed the federation's SOP. However, the SOP does not clarify whether retired athletes can import horses with concessions or for family members, though Rahman suggested it could be for Ahlawat's son, an active rider.

EFI Secretary General Col Jaiveer Singh termed it misuse of position. —*PTI*

AFTER WIN IN 2025 EVENT

Runner evades dope test, banned for 3 yrs

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Indian long-distance runner Pooja Aatmaram has been handed a reduced three-year ban by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after admitting she fled from a scheduled in-competition dope test last year.

The 30-year-old, who competes in the 5,000m and 10,000m, ran away from her chaperone after being notified for testing following her victory at the Indian Oil WNC Navy Half Marathon in Mumbai on 23 November 2025.

According to the AIU's detailed judgment, she was verbally informed of her selection by a Doping Control Officer (DCO) and Lead DCO but failed to sign the Doping Control Form. While being escorted to the Doping Control Station (DCS), she appeared "exhausted and sweating", picked up a water bottle near the finish line, looked visibly nervous and repeatedly glanced around.

Pooja Aatmaram ran away from her chaperone after being notified for testing in Mumbai on 23 November, 2025 —*ANI*

Before reaching the DCS, she sprinted in the opposite direction into a crowd. The chaperone gave chase but lost sight of her and reported the incident. Attempts by the DCO, Lead DCO and Race Director to contact her by phone were unsuccessful. No sample was collected.

- According to the AIU's detailed judgment, she was verbally informed of her selection by a Doping Control Officer (DCO).

Disciplinary proceedings began on 3 February 2026. Pooja apologised on 9 February and formally admitted the Anti-Doping Rule Violation on 17 February.

Her early admission reduced the standard four-year ban by one year. The suspension runs retrospectively from 3 February 2026, and all results from 23 November 2025 onwards stand disqualified. —*PTI*